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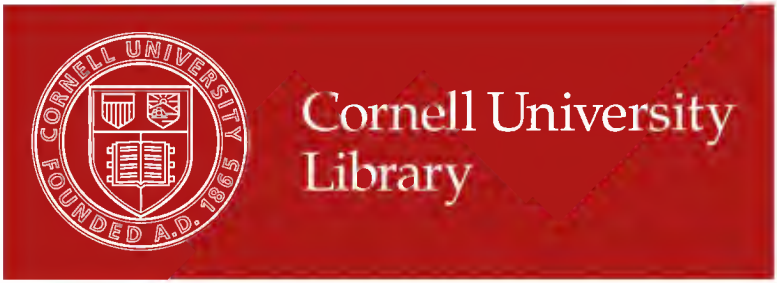

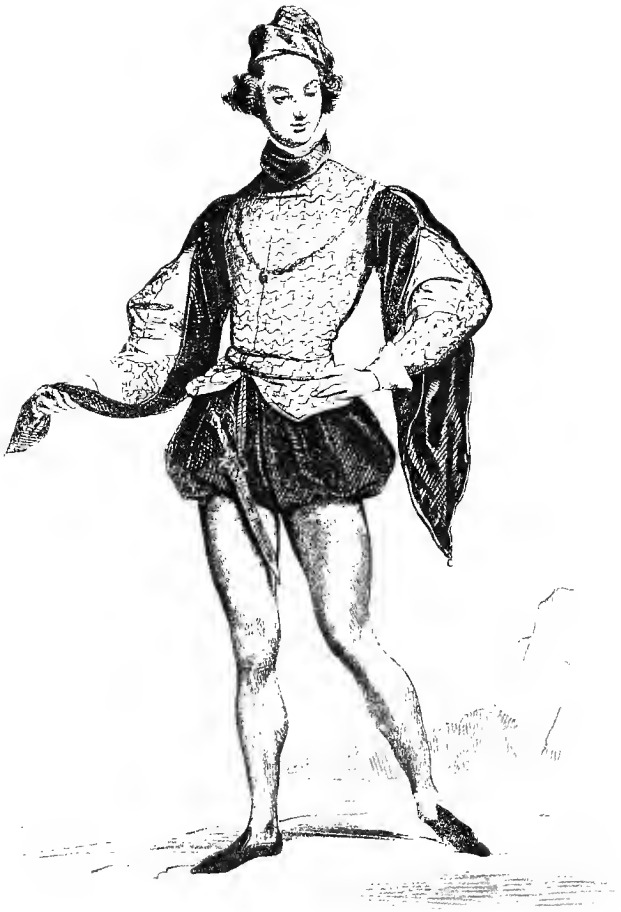

THE LIFE OF
ALFRED DE MUSSET

BY

ARVÈDE BARINE

DONE INTO ENGLISH

BY

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INTRODUCTION

I HEREBY render thanks to all those who have been kind enough to open to me their archives or their collections, and thus enable me to write this little book. M. Alexandre Dumas has taken the trouble to furnish me with information which has been of infinite valûe. Madame Maurice Sand, with a confidence for which I am profoundly grateful, has sent me a large number of unpublished letters, taken from the archives of Nohant. M. le Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, whose kindness and graciousness are known to all collectors, allowed me to profit by the treasures of his collection; to him I owe the fact of my having been able to consult the manuscript of Sainte-Beuve's "Journal" and numerous unpublished letters. M. Maurice Clouard, who knows all that one can know about Musset, was most liberal in the cooperation of his inexhaustible learning and precious library. M. Taigny has graciously placed at my disposal autograph letters of Musset, most of them unpublished. Others have furnished me with information of a kind to be found neither in books nor in manuscripts. I hereby acknowledge to all, my debt of gratitude.

A. B.

LIFE OF ALFRED DE MUSSET

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING—CHILDHOOD

EVERY generation sings for itself and in a language of its own. It has poets of its own to interpret its feelings and aspirations. Afterward come other men with other ideas and other passions, almost always quite inconsistent with those of their elders, and the newcomers are untouched by all that seemed, only the day before, to be so thrilling. Their intellectual preoccupations are no longer the same; nor their eyes, their ears, their souls. If peradventure they relish the poets of the bygone generation, it is after study and reflection, as if it were a question of writers of a distant time. This, too, is only on the condition that they find no cause to dread their influence. Otherwise they take an aversion to them, because the younger men feel an inward and perhaps wholesome need of thinking and feeling in other ways than their predecessors felt and thought. On these terms only do they gain consciousness of themselves.

Musset is beginning to be one of these poets

of yesterday whom only heads that are turning gray retain power to understand. No other in our century has been so well loved. Not one has waked in men's hearts so many of those prolonged echoes which spring only from a deep harmony with him who reads, and which never can spring from mere delight in art. He nevertheless has yielded to the same law. Our children already need that we explain to them why we cannot hear one line of his, were it the most unmeaning, without experiencing an emotion of joy or of gloom, why each one of our happinesses, each one of our sufferings revives the memory of some page, a line, a word to console or make us merry. To tell them these things is to betray the secret of our dreams and passions, to confess how romanesque and sentimental we were, and to cover us with ridicule in the eyes of our children who are so little ours. Still such will be the aim of this little book, and the coming historians of Musset will be constrained to do the same, though it may cost them dear. The soul of the poet of *The Nights* is bound by so many threads, and so strong threads, to the souls of those who were twenty between 1850 and 1870, that to essay to sever them would be in vain. Whether we make it a reproach against Musset or, on the contrary, see in it his foremost title to glory, matters not; to speak of him is to speak of the multitudes whom he subdued to their weal or to their woe.

A happier cradle for a child of genius than that of Alfred de Musset we could hardly imagine. He was born in Paris on the 11th day of December, 1810, of a good old family, in which the love of literature was traditional and whose every member from father to son had talent. To trace them back to Colin de Musset, the minstrel of the thirteenth century, whose name was perhaps merely Colin Muset, is unnecessary; but the poet's granduncle, the Marquis de Musset, gained a brilliant success in 1778 with a novel in letters "prompted," according to the preface, "by the love of virtue," and bearing a title to match the preface: *Correspondance d'un jeune militaire,* or *Memoirs de Luzigny et d'Hortense de Saint-Just.* The ancient Marquis lived down to 1839, representing, in his grandnephews' eyes, the old régime, not excepting feudal ages. His château had medieval parts with deep embrazures, double floors to hide trap-doors and lurking places. He himself had the strutting gait, the bristling points of the man who had worn the short *culotte.* Deep as was his contempt for newspapers, never would he fail to uncover when he came across the name of one of the royal family in the gazette, and yet he had not wholly escaped the influence of Rousseau. It was not uncommon for him to write phrases *à la* Jean Jacques: "One is happy only in the country, one is comfortable only under the shade

of his own fig-tree." With all his devout piety he had, when getting old, composed a satire against the Jesuits, which he signed Thomas Simplicien. The younger folks of the family were in the land of Cocagne when with him, but he could not comprehend romanticism.

The father of Alfred, M. de Musset-Pathay, much younger than the Marquis, harbored no grudges against the Revolution, for it had done him the service of taking away from him that little clerical collet and of giving him his emperor. In his existence he had intermingled literature with war and official labors, and in his writings the same diversity is manifest, a little of everything—novels, history, travels, books of erudition. The biography of Rousseau, in which he takes up his defense against the Grimm clique, is a patient and solid work, and, besides, he possessed a taste and skill in humorous verse. He was jovial and witty and quick at a retort, as well as caustic when the occasion demanded, but at bottom the best and kindest of men. As a father he was amiable, too indulgent, and of the eighteenth century in his way of thinking. This is a point to bear in mind. No more than the Marquis did M. de Musset-Pathay understand one word of romanticism. He had a sister who was a canoness and once a pupil at Saint-Cyr, a woman steeped in pious devotion. She had a little musty house in a *faubourg* at Vendôme, and here

she had quietly grown soured between snarling dogs and devout practises. Certain lines, written by one of her nephews, lead one to think that she, too, was not without the gift of repartee and that she was a match for her brother. While she made light of literature, she fixed a distinction between prose and verse: prose was mean drudgery, to be left to clodhoppers; verse was the worst of things shameful, one of those humiliations from which families never recover.

The maternal line of Musset was not less savory. His grandfather, Guyot-Desherbiers, once a lawyer, had associated with the *idéologues,* and his imagination was that of a poet, his wit merry and flashing. From all this had sprung an eighteenth-century Fantasio, more sparkling than the one that we know and nowise inferior to him in picturesque language, but without that note of tender melancholy which distinguishes the hero of Musset. M. Guyot-Desherbiers hardly dreamed of showing compassion for the troubles of fairy princesses; but to offset that, during the convulsions succeeding the 9th of Thermidor, he had, and not without great risk, saved more than one head. His grandchildren were fortunate enough to enjoy his inexhaustible vein of inspiration: a grandsire Fantasio was ever Fantasio. He died in 1828, weighed down with years. A poet at leisure, his great work was a poem on *Cats.* He made the cat a friend

of mankind, a lover of the poor and their scant fare.

> For them, for them his back is swelling,
> Within his breast for them is welling
> The paternoster of delight.

Technical difficulties were sport to him; he would write in triple rime—unaided by padding expletives—one whole canto of his poem, or he would invent more complicated rhythms. He had guessed the talent of Théodore de Banville sooner than Victor Hugo. His grandson missed his influence when he had to face his own people, with their classic bringing up, in defense of the overslidings and unforeseen epithets in the *Tales of Spain and Italy*. There are so many things that our Fantasios comprehend!

Grandmother Guyot-Desherbiers was a remarkable sample of the French *bourgeois* of the preceding century. With an infinite fund of good sense, she was not hindered from being a spiritual daughter of Jean Jacques, as passionate as Julie and Saint-Preux, and eloquent like them in her hours of emotion. Not the eloquence which makes people say of a woman that she talks like a book, but the eloquence and pathos which move the heart. At such a time she made a profound impression upon all the family, for they usually saw her undisturbed and very serious. The eldest daughter, Madame de Musset-Pathay, had much of her nature.

The intellectual ancestry of De Musset, we see, can readily be unraveled by any one interested in the mysteries of heredity. Among his ancestors we have found several intellectual men, filled with a joyous animation, and poets more or less, and two women of bright sensibility and warm and natural eloquence. It is to these latter that one may trace *The Nights* and all the fiery and passionate parts of his work. As for his aunt, the canoness, she filled the rôle of the fairy Carabosse, who could not be absent from the christening of a Prince Charming. When De Musset accuses himself in his letters of being a grumbler and writes, " I have grumbled my fill," or, " Now I am ready to be vexed at myself for all my grumbling," it is the canoness at her pranks, avenging herself for having a poet-nephew, with a breath, a very little one, of her own cross temper.

The child in whom the race was to unfold in full flower was a handsome, affectionate, fair-haired boy. A portrait of him at the age of three, in the troubadour style fashionable in the days of Queen Hortense, presents the youngster *en chemise* sitting in poetic open-air surroundings, with his little feet in a stream of water. Long curls give him the look of a very nice little girl. Near him is a big sword which he had demanded " for defense against the frogs." In another canvas he is a few years older, but still

keeping his pretty blond curls. He has also the same placid, ingenuous expression, and yet this did not come out of any failure to take life's troubles in a tragic way, or to enjoy its delights with ardor. He was already in the highest degree impressionable, excitable, and eloquent even, if we are to believe his brother Paul, who tells us that, when hardly out of his swaddling-clothes, the embryo poet had "oratorical impulses and picturesque expressions in depicting childish woes and pleasures." Already he had an "impatience to enjoy" and the "disposition to squander time" which never left him afterward. One day when some red shoes were brought and his mother could not dress him quickly enough to suit him, he stamped his foot and cried, "Hurry, mama, or my new shoes will be old." In fact, he was beginning to suffer from palpitations and choking.

To deal with these quivering organisms, intelligent and light hands are requisite, and M. de Musset-Pathay was only too indulgent. He, too, might have said:

> Whatever he has done, quick pardon first I crave,
> Whatever he may wish, I ask that he may have—
> On spoiling children, this is all my mind.

But M. de Musset-Pathay hardly had any time to be busy with small children. He left his wife to rear Paul and Alfred, who lost nothing

thereby. They owed to her one of those wholesome and happy childhoods of which nothing need be said, in which the memorable events, forever stamped on the memory, were a game, or a sentence to the dark closet.

Musset began his studies with a teacher who used to climb up the trees with his pupils. The lessons were none the worse for this, though there was a difficult moment when the scholar came across the *Thousand and One Nights* and *la Bibliothèque bleue.* His little head began to turn, and for months, in class and out of it, he thought only of enchanters and paladins. He hunted through his father's house, in rue Cassette, for secret passages which make us hear steps sounding within the wall, and for concealed doors for traitors and deliverers to spring through. Some one gave him Don Quixote, which quieted him without correcting him of the idea that life is like the enchanted forest in which the four brethren Aymon had miraculous adventures. He was born with the faith in luck, and was ever one of those who believe in fate's surprises, only deeming themselves baffled and duped when that which happens is merely what ought to happen.

Men of such a disposition submit to life instead of being its maker, and the case with Musset was of this kind.

He was seven when he devoured the *Thousand*

and One Nights, and that same year he and the whole household made a long stay in the country in an old rambling house, a source of great amusement for the children, which was hard by the farm of goodman Piédeleu, which he has described in *Margot:* " Madame Piédeleu, his wife, had given him nine children, eight of them boys, and if each of the eight was not six feet tall, they were pretty near it. This was certainly the stature of the goodman, and the mother could boast her five feet five; the handsomest woman, too, in the country round. The eight boys, strong as steers, the terror and the admiration of the hamlet, obeyed their sire like so many slaves." The little folks from Paris were never weary of watching the tribe of giants and of tumbling in the hayricks. Yet it was after a summer spent in this wholesome fashion that the junior, as soon as he came home, had " a fit of mania," as the brother terms it. " In one day," says Paul, " he smashed a mirror in the parlor with an ivory ball, cut the new curtains with scissors, and pasted a broad, red wafer upon the map of Europe in the very middle of the Mediterranean. These three disasters drew upon him not the smallest reprimand, because he seemed to be in consternation." This anecdote, which at first sight seems puerile, casts a flash of light upon the inequality of Alfred's character. No one could show better sense, a clearer head, when the nerves were not con-

cerned, but they often were. They were irritable, exciting " fits of mania," in the course of which he would do mischief against his own will. Next he bewailed it all, overwhelming himself with reproaches, but continued none the less at the mercy of his nerves.

From his brother, also, we learn that he drew his own portrait as Valentine at the beginning of *The Two Mistresses*. The page that we are about to read is therefore a personal reminiscence, showing us a too impressionable child. " To make you better acquainted, we must tell you a trait of his childhood. Valentine, when ten or twelve, slept in a little room with a glass door, behind his mother's bedchamber. The room had a somewhat paltry look, and was encumbered with dusty wardrobes. With other lumber, it contained an old portrait in a broad gilt frame. When, on any fine morning, the sun was beating upon the portrait, the child would kneel on the bed and creep close to it, and when they thought him to be asleep, until it was time for the teacher to come, he would lie there for hours, with his brow resting on one corner of the frame, and the sunbeams striking the gildings surrounded him with a halo, as it were, in which his swimming eyes were dazzled. In this attitude he would have a thousand dreams, while queer ecstasies laid hold of him. The more brilliantly the light shone the more his heart would expand.

Here it was, as he told me himself, that he conceived a passionate longing for sunlight and gold."

Again, at the age of thirteen, during a hunt in which he barely missed wounding his brother, he had nervous spasms of sufficient violence to induce fever. Noting this, we have the key to many incidents of his troubled existence.

His college years were as destitute of event as were those of his earlier childhood. From the sixth form onward he was a day-pupil at the college of Henri IV., and made good progress. Now and then he got his share of fisticuffs. We may believe that he gave some in return. In *The Two Mistresses* he has told us the rest: "His first steps in life were guided by the instinct of inborn passion. In college he sought intimates solely among boys wealthier than himself—not out of pride, but from taste. He was precocious in his studies, and was less incited by self-love than by a kind of need of distinction. He would sometimes begin to shed tears in the very midst of the class when on a Saturday he had missed his place on the honor-bench." During holidays his father would take him out for family visits, and he was present at a skirmish with the canoness, or even enjoyed the unparalleled honor of sleeping in his uncle's secret chamber. This is all that happened to him between the ages of nine and sixteen.

In 1827 he took the second prize in philosophy in the grand competition. Musset, in his essay, treated the pyrrhonists as sophists, as was required by etiquette, but he added that it mattered but little whether they were right, "provided that what is do not change and be not taken from us," *dummodo quae sunt nec mutentur, nec eripiantur*—all of which looks pyrrhonist enough essentially. After the award his mother described the ceremony to a friend. There were flourishes of trumpets, princes, the four faculties in their robes, and her son was so beautiful! She had a good cry, and everything was lovely. "For three days," she continues, "we have seen nothing but crowns, and books with gilt edges; we needed carriages to carry them away." Musset, after this apotheosis, left the benches of the classroom. He was bachelor of arts, and he was all energy in his refusal to fit for the Polytechnic. A long letter to his friend, Paul Foucher, written, on the 23d of September following, from the château of the Marquis, gives us a first glimpse of the forces at work within him. We must bear in mind, as we read these fragments, that he was then at the awkward age, when the ideas are as loose-jointed as the body. He was the first to say, at a later day, that he had been "as shallow as the next man."

He had but recently heard of the sudden death of Madame Guyot-Desherbiers. His holidays

were broken up and rendered gloomy. "My brother has started back to town. I am alone in the château; there is no one to speak to but my uncle, who, it is true, shows me a thousand kindnesses; but the ideas of a white-haired head are not those of a head covered with blond locks. He is a man of extreme erudition. Whenever I speak of dramas which please me or verses which are striking, he replies: 'You would rather read that in some good historian, would you not? It is always truer and more exact. You have read Hamlet, and you know the effect produced on him by the learned and erudite Polonius.' And that man is good withal, virtuous, loved by every one. He is not one of those to whom the brook is only flowing, the forest nothing but timber of this or that species and so many hundred fagots, Heaven bless them! Perhaps they are happier than you and I."

We feel that Musset is a prey to the distress which often seizes upon young men as they perceive, at the moment when they begin to think for themselves, that they have become strangers to the round of ideas in which they have been reared. The discovery disconcerts them as a lack of filial respect, albeit that it may flatter their pride. In 1827 romanticism was fermenting in the veins of youth. Young men knew the *Meditations* and the *Odes et Ballades* by heart. Shakespeare and Byron, Goethe and Schiller were their

passion. The preface to *Cromwell* was soon to appear, the adversaries of the new school of poetry were preparing for resistance, and the two camps were seen to be forming which were to come to blows at the first representation of *Hernani*. Musset was young among the young, and we can conceive his indignation when the Marquis, reasonably no doubt, called it to his attention that Plutarch deserves more confidence than Shakespeare, and that it is not by any means sure that Moses had all the ideas which De Vigny ascribed to him.

In his letter he passed at once to himself and his future: " I feel dull and gloomy, and do not believe you to be more cheerful than I, but I have not even the courage to work. Eh! What could I do? Take up some old thesis again or be original in spite of myself and my verse? Since I have been reading newspapers, my sole pastime here, somehow all that seems to have a wretched finish! I do not know whether it is the quibbling of commentators, the mania of adapters that disgusts me, but I would rather not write or I could wish to be Shakespeare or Schiller. So I do nothing, feeling that the worst that can befall any man with lively passions is to be without them. I am not in love, I am doing nothing, nothing keeps me here. . . . I would give twenty-five francs to have one of Shakespeare's pieces here in English. The papers are so in-

sipid—critics so flat! Make systems, my friends, establish rules; you are working only on the cold monuments of the past. A man of genius will come, and he will upset your scaffoldings, laugh at your poetics. I feel at moments a wish to take the pen and defile one or two sheets of paper, but the initial difficulty deters, and a sovereign disgust makes me stretch my arms and shut my eyes. How is it that I am left here for so long? I need to look at woman; I need a pretty foot and a shapely waist; I need to love. I would fall in love with my cousin, who is old and ugly, if she were not thrifty and a pedant." There ensue two big pages of complaints about his ennui and the law studies for which he is destined by the family: "No, my friend," he concludes, "I cannot believe it; I have that pride; neither you nor I am destined to be merely estimable lawyers or intelligent attorneys. In the depths of my soul an instinct calls out the contrary. I still believe in happiness, though very unhappy nowadays."

In these schoolboy effusions, it will be noticed, he is racked with the need of writing. White paper attracts and dismays him—the two go well together. This is the bursting forth into bud of his vocation, and we detect it at the very beginning, as Musset was not one of those infant prodigies, after the fashions of Goethe or Hugo, who used to cry for their nurse in rime. At

seventeen his poetical baggage was utterly insignificant.

As for the distressing ennui always gnawing him, his discouragement in the face of the future at the moment when all is opening before him, there is nothing within him that is peculiarly his. It is a mental state, noticed again and again by a great variety of authors in the generation which was coming to manhood during the Restoration, and by Stendhal, and Musset himself, wrongly or rightly attributed to the concussion caused by the downfall of the empire. Their argument is well known. The void left by a Napoleon cannot be filled. On the morrow after the violent efforts which he exacted from the French, the young men of the Restoration found themselves idlers. Comparing what was going on around them to the imperial gallop through the capitals of Europe, they held the present to be colorless and mean; they knew not what to do with themselves. To these young men Musset has devoted one chapter of the *Confession:* "A feeling of indescribable discomfort began to work in all young hearts. Condemned to quiet by the rulers of the world, delivered over to vulgar pedants of every species, to sloth and to ennui, the younger men felt in the depth of their souls the presence of an intolerable wretchedness."

The source of this moral wretchedness may be

a subject for discussion; we cannot deny the existence of it. It was a stubborn disease. Maxime Du Camp, who was a dozen years younger than Musset, writes in his *Literary Souvenirs:* "The generation of artists and writers which came before me, the one to which I belonged, had a youth of deplorable sadness—a sadness without cause as well as without object; purely abstract, but inherent in the being and in the epoch." Young men were haunted by the idea of suicide. "It was no fashion merely, as might be thought; it was a general breaking down which rendered the heart sad, the thoughts somber, and made men see dimly a deliverance in death."

The "very unhappy" student of the letter to Paul Foucher was then to enter the world with a soul poisoned with germs of disgust. Another disease which he shared with many of his contemporaries prevented the wound from healing: "I had," so he wrote long afterward, "or supposed I had, that nasty malady, doubt, which essentially is a childish thing, whenever it is not a prejudice and an affectation." (To the Duchesse de Castries, 1840.) The question here is not merely one of religious lukewarmness, but of that moral anemia which impels us to lose faith in everything. Musset ascribed this plague to the influence of English and German ideas, represented by Byron and Goethe. Whatever

the truth, the trouble was there, contributing to the general breaking down mentioned by Du Camp. Musset had been stricken at the age when it is most important to believe in something, no matter what.

CHAPTER II

MUSSET AND THE CENACLE

THE two years after his leaving college were decisive for his development. He seemed to be doing nothing. "He pretended to be studying law," he says of himself in *The Two Mistresses,* "and really spent his time strolling about the boulevard or the Tuileries." Soon he quitted law for medicine, but the dissecting-room gave him the horrors; he fled, could not eat, dreamed of corpses, and solemnly renounced the adoption of a profession. "Man," he declared to his family, "is now too little a thing upon this particle of sand on which we live. Most decidedly I shall not consent to become a particular variety of man."

Despite appearances he was far from losing his time. Paul Foucher had taken him, when a mere boy, to Victor Hugo, and after leaving school he was assiduous in keeping up the acquaintance, becoming the Benjamin in the Cenacle. Alfred de Vigny, Sainte-Beuve, Mérimée, Charles Nodier, the two Deschamps brothers, accustomed themselves, in imitation of Hugo, their chief and master, to keeping the boy about them,

admitting him to library discussions in which they laid down the principle that romanticism sprang from the " need of truth "—exactly what, half a century later, was said of naturalism, " that the poet should have but one model, nature; one guide, truth "; that, as a consequence, he requires to mix the ugly with the beautiful in his works, " the grotesque with the sublime," since nature has given him the example, and " all in nature is not art."

In his presence they settled what their new poetic was to be: " We should like a verse at once free, genuine, straightforward, understanding how to break at the right moment and, by displacing the cesura, to disguise the monotone of the Alexandrine; fond of the *enjambement* extending it rather than of the inversion that makes it intricate; faithful to rime, that slave-queen, that supreme grace of our poetry, that parent of our meter, inexhaustible in the variety of its devices, with inconceivable secrets of elegance and execution."

They took him out for esthetic walks, in which the Cenacle, headed by Victor Hugo, practised at romantic sensations; and we must own that Musset did not always bring to them an edifying mental attitude. His companions took their part as neophytes seriously. Whether climbing up the towers of Notre Dame to contemplate in imagination the Paris of the begging vagrants or

walking the plain of Montrouge to see the sun go down, nobody ever forgot to be romantic. Musset irreverently laughed at the satin waistcoats of his mates, their beards fluttering in the wind, their attitudes of respect before an ogiveal arch, and their grandiloquent apostrophes to the landscape.

He was also at the evenings with Nodier in the library, when each man would recite his works, prose or verse. In a word, he had the signal good fortune to be adopted, spoiled, lectured, indoctrinated by one of the most glorious intellectual *élites* ever possessed by any country, and he was straightway to prove that the good seed had not fallen into stony places or among the thorns. In him poetry awoke so quickly that it was swifter than the spring; it was an aurora which grew and grew before the sight, and whose earliest gleams flung him into unforgotten ravishment.

It was in the course of solitary walks in the Bois de Boulogne, less frequented then than now, that he overheard within him the song of his earliest rimes. In 1828, in the spring, his relatives had established themselves at Auteuil. He would go out into the woods to read, and there he received the yet stealthy visits recalled in the *Nuit d'Août*.

From these walks he brought home pieces of verse which he did not admit into his collections,

and with good reason, because imitation was too much felt in them, but which are precious to the biographer on account of their extreme diversity. They are the verses of a beginner seeking his path, and not irresistibly drawn to one or the other side. A reading of André Chénier inspired an elegy:

Both white and sweet she comes, the Athenian maid,
To seek the rill from springs beneath the fig-tree's shade.

A meeting of the Cenacle brought out a ballad, and next Musset wrote a drama in honor of Hugo. We read in this:

One man in a helmet's worth two with hats.
Four doctors with cap, a dozen in wigs
And twenty-four tonsured above the nape of their necks.

Another ballad, called the *Dream,* and by its rhythm foreshadowing the *Ballad to the Moon,* was printed, thanks to Paul Foucher, in a country paper:

The rope so bare and lean
  Would shiver 'neath the cold,
    Cold bell-tower,
And shirk with bitter tone and keen,
  Will ye miss in your convent-hold
    The Advent hour?

Monks round the candle-flame
  With brows against the pavement stone
    Washed all clear,

Blushing at the Virgin's name,
Would hide each sin full-blown
Far from her ear.

Is this a parody of the poetry of the romantics already, like the *Ballad to the Moon?* There would be nothing wonderful in that, for Musset, in the Cenacle, was zealous as a pupil, but not docile. They were kind and listened to the youngster, and he profited by that, and on certain questions flew in the face of the master himself. He never considered the rich rime was obligatory. On the appearance of his first poetry he wrote to his mother's brother, Desherbiers, sending him the volume: "You will see feeble rimes; I had an aim in making them, and know what to think of them; but it was important to distinguish oneself from this school of rimesters who have undertaken to reconstruct, but have concerned themselves only with form, supposing themselves to be rebuilding when they were replastering." (January, 1830.) A witness of his first groping attempts, Sainte-Beuve declares that he unrimed afterward, intentionally, the *Andalouse,* and that it was "better rimed in the early sketch."

He also considered himself emancipated—his presumption will be pardoned in view of his youth—from all the forced and declamatory in the ancestors of romanticism. Six years later he reminded George Sand how he had laughed of

old at the *Nouvelle Heloise* and *Werther*. He had no right to laugh so much, for he had worse on his conscience. In 1828 he translated for a bookseller De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*. His rendering is royally faithless; this, indeed, is its chief interest. Not only does Musset cut and prune a dozen pages here, fifty there, but he enlarges and restores, and in a very decided spirit, invariably adding romantic embellishments everywhere, first to the sentiments: the hero of the English original forgave a poor creature picked up in the gutter, the one in the version assures her of his respect and admiration. He adds enormously to the sums of money: two or three hundred francs given to a young man in trouble become twenty-five thousand, fortunes swell beyond measure, and the business of petty lenders assumes mighty proportions. He embroiders events with episodes from his own stock: reminiscences of the dissecting-room, dark adventures to suit the taste of the time. In brief, there was a general parade of plumes, after which he was not permitted to go on laughing at Saint-Preux or at Charlotte's friend.

At that time he really appeared to be carried away by the flood of romanticism. His great friends of the Cenacle made him recite his poems, gave him good advice, and, it is needless to add, pushed him along in their peculiar path. The

drama *à la* Hugo was applauded greatly, and Émile Deschamps gave a reception for a reading of *Don Paez,* at which rose cries of admiration at the lines about the dragon.

A dragon, yellow and blue, who lay sleeping in the hay. There were other cries approving of the green sleeves of the Dawn:

> Behold the watchful huntsmen,
> And the black feet of falcons
> Perched upon their sleeves of green.

Sainte-Beuve thought this beginner too far in advance, and reproached him with the abuse of *enjambements* and trivialities. It is surprising that, with his extraordinary penetration, he did not guess at once that Musset was a romantic-born classic, which is as much as saying an accidental romantic, and that it was a mistake to count on him absolutely, drawn this way and that between his instincts and the influence of surroundings. The rest of the Cenacle were excusable for not suspecting it. Musset did not conceal his task for the eighteenth century, but we overlook a partiality for *Crébillon* and *Clarissa Harlowe* in a runaway from college. As for his very significant admiration for Voltaire's poetry, that was not taken so seriously in the case of an apprentice of romanticism, fed on Shakespeare and saturated with Byron, one made to learn his trade, not unprofitably, in Mathurin Régnier. I

insist on these details because the Cenacle at a later time accused Musset of desertion. That was unjust; there was no defection, only misunderstanding. The future author of the *Nuits* was so little theirs, body and soul, as they fancied, that he always gave ear to other counsels, though of far less authority. We may recall that the family did not like the new literary school. These amiable people did not stop at tacit disapproval. They withstood the tendencies which they deemed destructive, and Musset's letter to Desherbiers, a passage from which we have just read, proves that their effect had not been a dead loss. Here are other fragments: "I ask pardon for complicated sentences; I have got over them, I believe. . . . As for the broken rhythms in the lines, I think that they do not harm in what may be called the recitative—that is, the transition of sentiments and actions. In the rest they ought to be rare. I will ask you to notice the composition more than the details, for I am far from having a fixed method. I shall change a number of times yet. I await hints from you. My friends have given me praises, which I put into my rear pocket. I owe to four or five conversations with you my reforming opinions on very important points, and I have made many reflections since. But you know they do not go so far as to make me love Racine."

Waiting for his reflections to bear their fruit,

good or bad, he wrote at full speed his *Tales of Spain and Italy,* and his friends noticed in them nothing but a crescendo of impertinence toward everything that the *bourgeois,* in his crust of classical prejudices, made it his duty to respect and admire. After the *Songs* and *Don Paez* came the *Chestnuts from the Fire, Portia,* the *Ballad to the Moon, Mardoche,* and the last piece was the most impudent; accordingly all agreed in predicting a great success for it. Musset had decided to have his work printed in order to gain the right to quit his position as law-clerk which his father had imposed. His volume came out toward the 1st of January, 1830.

This is the time to examine the drawing of Deveria at the head of this volume. It represents Musset at about his twentieth year, in the costume of a page, which he liked and several times wore. To judge by his slender waist and his beardless and boyish face, we should think him younger than he really was. In doublet and tights he has the haughty grace which Clouet used to lend to his models, and their extreme and refined elegance. His physiognomy is somewhat lacking in fire, and this through no fault of the artist. His face was not at all times glowing with fire; it was as changing as the humor which it expressed. There were two Mussets suiting the moment and the direction of the breeze. One, bashful and silent, somewhat cold in appearance,

is that which showed itself commonly in his earlier youth, even after the uproar caused by his début. A college friend of his, who saw him very frequently down to the spring of 1833, assured me that he saw hardly any other. This is the Musset whom Lamartine described "stretched out nonchalantly in the shade, his elbow on a cushion, his head resting on his hand, upon a divan in Nodier's gloomy parlor." Lamartine noticed his "floating locks, his eyes rather dreamy than brilliant," his "modest and habitual silence in the midst of the bewildering tumult of a babbling company of women and poets," and he took no further notice of him; it took him thirty years to observe anything more.

In *Victor Hugo by a Witness of his Life* we find a neat sketch of Musset which is entirely different: "With his steady, clear glance, his dilating nostrils, and his widely open and vermilion lips." This is the one who showed himself by fits and starts—Musset quivering with life and passion, whose blue eyes darted fire, whom pleasure enraptured, and who was overwhelmed by the least emotion, weeping like a child; the Musset whom a delirium would seize the moment he was overtaken by fever, who was the prey of every inconsistency, of every extreme. He was kind, generous, of a deep and passionate delicacy of feeling, and also violent and capable of great harshness. The same hour saw him de-

lightfully tender and absurdly confident and then suspicious to the point of unkindness, mingling in the same breath adoration and sarcasm, suffering hundredfold the pangs which he was inflicting, and next showing a charming regret, eloquent, frank, and irresistible repentance, throughout which he loathed and tried to humble himself, taking cruel delight in making his own heart bleed—a heart that was ever suffering pain. At other moments he was a dandy, a gay worldling, full of sparkling wit and banter, at others again he would never move from the company of young ladies, whose purity enraptured him and with whom he would waltz forever, talking nonsense and trifles. Altogether a complex being, not inoffensive—far from it—and sometimes frightening women whom he liked; but more than one side of his character was great, with nothing small or base—a seductive, engaging being, who could not be otherwise than unhappy.

Contemporaries who saw him in these varying aspects in succession have given utterance to contradictory judgments, which all contained a share of truth.

CHAPTER III

TALES OF SPAIN AND ITALY

THE *Tales of Spain and Italy* dismayed the classicals. Hitherto nobody had ridiculed them in so free and easy a style, so that the critics grasped their ferules, and Musset caught it on his knuckles. I believe, though I dare not warrant the correctness of the statement, that the first article was one in the *Universal,* January 22–23, 1830. It had as an epigraph the lines from *Chestnuts from the Fire:*

> I hope baked apples none will throw
> To lay footlights and curtains low.

It began as follows: "Behold the force of conscience! The first cry of M. de Musset, who does not like baked apples, is: Pray don't throw baked apples at me! He feels that the reader will be tempted to fling something at him, and of course he wards off the danger which he most dreads. What shall we fling at M. de Musset then?"

The critic, F., at once begs his readers to pardon him for "dragging their eyes over the *poetry* of M. de Musset," and he analyzes the volume

with strong signs of disgust. The faults in the French revolt him, the running of verse into verse, realistic terms like pot or rags pain him. Poor man!

The *Figaro* of February 4th is on its guard, in fear of being caught by some joke: "Is his book a parody? Is it written in good faith?" *Figaro,* after weighing everything, admits the good faith, and is all the more indignant. He scolds the young author for beginning "his poetical life" by exaggerations and mad freaks, and shows him to what he is exposing himself: "Ridicule, once stamped on the brow or the name of a writer, often stays there like one of those stains which are not to be wiped out except by vigorous application of soap and brush." M. de Musset deserves to escape this sad fate, for here and there traces of talent appear in his collection in despite of his "contempt for the rules of good sense and of the language."

The same day the *Temps* declared that a portion of the public imagined there was a parody. For its part, it finds a very personal inspiration in the verses of the newcomer. It recognizes that there are charming images and sparkling dialogues. But the characters are inconsistent; for instance, *Camargo* "contradicts every moment the nature of her Italian heart by the forms of abstract discourse, by metaphysical exclamations, by images and comparisons quite beyond the ma-

terial and moral world of Italy." Would it be a possible thing that the critic had not recognized in the *Chestnuts from the Fire* a double parody of tragedy and of the Romantic form? *Camargo* is Hermione compelling Orestes-Abbe Annibal to kill Pyrrus-Raphael—and greeting him afterward with imprecations. Respect unto the "nature of the Italian soul" had been the least anxiety to the author, and here he was right. In the same article, on *Mardoche:* "From one end to the other, it is an enigma void of interest, poor in style and mere buffoonery, and dull at that."

The *Quotidienne* of February 12th is relatively amiable, seeing in the beginner "a poet and a madman, one inspired and a beginner in rhetoric": in the *Tales,* a "strange book," where you are tossed "from the height of the finest poetry to the most incredible baseness in diction, from the most graceful ideas to the most hideous pictures, from the most animated and happy expression to the most inexcusable barbarisms." *Don Paez* reveals a true dramatic sense, and contains profound observations with details of great poetic richness. Apart from this it is a poem, "crowded with enough of the ridiculous to stock a complete literary school." The same critic, in a second article, February 23d, declares that there is more promise in Musset than in any other of the poets of our epoch, a compliment which looks too much as if it had been put in with the

sole aim of displeasing Victor Hugo; but, adds the journal, the "child" must be put to school if he wishes to amount to anything.

The *Globe*—this paper gave proof of a deal of friendship for the romantics—begins on February 17th by remarking an advanced party in whose opinion "M. Hugo is almost stationary . . . M. de Vigny classic," and M. de Musset the one great poet in France. It avows that, so far as the *Globe* is concerned, the first impression was bad: "Two things in his poems are astonishing and shocking—the ugliness of the substance and the fatuity of the form." The critic, as he advanced in his work, perceived "certain beauties; then these grew, and next they predominated over defects"; and he is awake to the "frank inspiration, force in execution, the sentiment and the movement lacking in so many poets. M. de Musset, it is true, exaggerates some of the defects of the new school." The latter "breaks the lines, M. de Musset dislocates them; the former resorts to slidings from one line to the next, he lavishes them." Yet, despite the *Chestnuts from the Fire,* which "revolts" and "disgusts" the author of the notice, despite *Mardoche,* which looks as if written by a maniac, the *Tales* announce "an original and genuine talent."

The most vinegary criticism has remained closed to the public. It came from Vendôme.

His aunt, the canoness, had learned by the public voice that she had a poet-nephew, and she sourly reproached M. de Musset-Pathay for having brought this disgrace upon her. She had always blamed her brother for loving literature too much; now he could see to what that led.

Forgiveness of injuries did not figure in her credo. As a chastisement for the *Tales,* the canoness "disowned and disinherited the males of her family for derogation," and still the first edition was expurgated! The impious conversation of *Mardoche* with the beadle has been suppressed. Meantime Musset read the newspapers with great calmness and attention, and without indignation. He did not call his critics mere ushers and pedants. He did not lose faith in literature and in humanity. "Just criticism," said he, "gives more impetuosity, more ardor. Unjust censure is never to be feared. In any case, I am resolved to move onward with a word in answer." M. de Musset-Pathay, who was as attentive and less composed, wrote to a friend *à propos* of the cruel article in the *Universal:* "My anxiety as to possible disputes was happily unfounded, and I was surprised to hear of the stoicism of our young philosopher. I know from the only confidant he has, Paul (who betrays him to me alone), that he profits by all the criticisms, and is giving up this sort of composition in great part. The confidant adds that

my surprise will be great at the change. I am wishing and waiting." This letter is to M. de Cairol, April 2, 1830.

Musset was modest and extremely discerning. Hence his patient and attentive attitude when people were speaking ill of his poetry. Withal he had been indemnified for the insults of the press. Not that the general public was for him. Good folks, so Sainte-Beuve relates, saw in the book "only the Ballad, and would hear no pleasantry on this point of new invention: it was an outburst of broadest laughter." But the women and the younger people declared for Musset, and all the ancient retainers of the classical party felt more or less distinctly that here was something new.

There was, indeed: first, sensations of singular vividness, expressed with great power—"hot youth, that tree with rugged bark that cast its shadow on path, horizon, and on all." A genuine sensation is so strongly brought out, on the next page, that the reader feels its influence, and sees, as it sweeps by, that image dear to Don Paez, who "could never shut his eyes and not behold his mistress passing, white with eyes of black." Elsewhere the sensation becomes subtle, but loses no strength. It is sensuous poetry, but of a very refined and very delicate quality: "Night is of power to make women, like the flowers, more fair, and each evening breeze

that touches them steals fragrance sweeter to inhale."

In other places, again, an accidental sensation gives the poet merely an epithet, but this is enough to summon up a picture: " Soft and mellow, the moonbeam blended long, silvery streams with golden flames on velvets pale and marble gay." Musset had seen the moonlight glide through the stained glass, and he feels compelled to personify it to interpret the impression of something airy and material at once, which might have been grasped, and which flowed nevertheless through the windows, though they were closed. It was very new, very modern, or, if you will, very antique. Homer and Virgil had epithets like his, and before a written or chanted poetry came to be, the early myths translated impressions such as these. So Diana, as she comes to kiss Endymion, poured through the network of the foliage with her soft and supple body.

Further he is very antique and very modern at once in his comparison where he is emancipated from any care for the pompous which beset so many poets of the eighteenth century. He rediscovered the rough and felicitous bluntness of the older poets, their skill in realistic detail which, striking the imaginations, causes the scene to rise before our sight: " Slowly round and round the she-wolves turn, and hold their gaunt snouts toward each other."

His literary training had, of course, mixed this old pagan realism with elements foreign to it. Musset called Régnier his first master, and, indeed, the latter appears in more than one passage, as, for example, in the case of the spinners, who, " with callous hands, shake the cotton thread and feebly drop their chins upon their knees."

The romantic in the *Tales of Spain and Italy* might thus be accounted new. Victor Hugo, in the *Orientales,* had gone so far, but Musset outran him in boldness. His dislocated lines, his riotous metaphors put him in the utmost van of the revolutionary host, while his irony and turbulent animation put him in the forlorn hope whom no man could expect to keep in line. He himself had taken pains to give warning that every one would waste time and trouble in the attempt. He had hinted to the riming school " that he wanted nothing in common with them; though he rimed *idée* with *fâchée,* the Muses came."

Like irreverence touching other reforms, this audacious poet had allowed himself to parody, in the *Ballad to the Moon,* the rimes and images of the romantic school, and he proclaimed the intention to express what he felt, not what it might be the fashion to feel. The fashion was all for distressing and finical ways: Musset ventured to be cheerful, and made fun of the melancholy bards. " As for melancholy, it has a flavor

of holes in stockings, garret-rooms, and pennies worse for wear."

He did not deceive his masters in the Cenacle; he used to show, as plainly as could be, as to what points he parted with them. As to telling them where he would be on the morrow, if he were warming *Candide* or *Manfred* over again, he would have been puzzled what to say. He did not know, and had no one to help him to have clear sight of his own mind. "The *Tales of Spain and Italy*," said Sainte-Beuve, "presented a sort of enigma as to the nature, the limits, and the destiny of this talent." An enigma whose obscurity was increased by the queerest jumble of sophomoric trivialities—"by the small size of her feet she was Andalusian and a countess"—and soaring verses such as genius conceives and talent can never manufacture, no matter how much pains it may take: "The sunbeams are splendid on the crests of the seas, as the soldier, defeated, shatters his spears." How could a book so preposterous, so filled with exaggerations and incongruities, not fail to shock the logical and delight the irrational? Good folks had some consolation in asserting with perfect truth that the success of the *Tales of Spain and Italy* was due to scandal.

The culprit kept quiet and reflected, finding truth in certain critiques, and preparing himself for the evolution which his poetic temperament

rendered inevitable as soon as he became his own master. "Our romantic is dehugotizing himself completely," wrote his father, on the 19th of September, to his friend Cairol. There was no further need of indiscretions to suspect that *The Revue de Paris,* in July, published the literary manifesto entitled *Secret Thoughts of Rafael,* which the Cenacle took for a disavowal and which was but a declaration of independence. Reading it now in cool blood, we hardly can comprehend how any one could have made a mistake about it.

Still the mistake was made, and Musset's relations with Hugo's group grew cooler. It is right to add that Musset betrayed a purpose to walk without leading-strings in the future. The term poetic school appeared to him now void of sense. "We discuss a good deal," he wrote to Paul. "I find, indeed, that we lose too much in reasoning and hair-splitting. I met Eugene Delacroix one evening returning from the theater, and we discussed painting in the open street, from his door to mine and from mine to his, until two o'clock in the morning; we could not separate. With the good Antony Deschamps, I talked from eight till eleven on the boulevard. When I leave Nodier's or Devéria's, I argue all the way in the street with one or the other. Have we made any progress for all this? Could we turn off a better line in a poem or give a better touch in a painting? Each one of us has within

him a particular sound which he can give forth, like violin or clarinet. All the reasonings in creation could never bring from a blackbird's throat the song of a starling. What the artist or poet requires is emotion. When, in composing a verse, I feel a certain thrilling of the heart which I know, I am convinced that my verse is of the best quality that I can be delivered of."

Farther on in the same letter, "Horace de V. told me a thing which I did not know: that since my last poems they are all saying that I am converted. Converted to what? Do they fancy that I have been to confession to Abbé Delille, or that, by reading Laharpe, I have been touched with grace? Doubtless they are expecting that instead of saying, 'Take thy sword and slay him,' I am henceforth to say, 'Weapon thy arm with homicidal glaive and sever the thread of his days.' Nonsense for nonsense, I would much rather recommence the *Chestnuts from the Fire* and *Mardoche*." (August 14, 1831.)

Months more elapsed in barren discussion. A deep, moral convulsion, caused by his father's death in April, 1832, at last led to a return to labor, and old friends were summoned on New Year's eve to listen to the *Cup and the Lips* and *Of What Young Maidens Dream*. It was a very chilly meeting, and when they separated the alienation of the nursling of romanticism from the Cenacle was consummated. From that mo-

ment forth Musset was isolated. He had wished and sought for that.

The new volume appeared just at the end of 1832, under the title, *Scene in an Armchair.* Critics took little note of it. Sainte-Beuve had an article, *Revue des Deux Mondes* of January 15, 1833, in which Alfred de Musset was discussed seriously, and classed among the most vigorous artists of the time. One newspaper warmly commended the work, two others dismissed it with abuse as an ill-digested mess, a work for which no name is bad enough, wearisome and rambling. Most journals disdainfully gave him the tribute of silence. The sullen attitude was continued during following years, and it corresponded to that of the general public. Musset had suddenly sunk back into the shade. True success—that which is not forgotten and fixes a writer's definite class—kept him waiting long. He beheld glory before death came, but he did not long enjoy it. The reasons for this continued eclipse are rather complex.

For the bitterness of the journalists he was somewhat to blame. Pretending not to bear them any ill will for their insults, he had not hidden boyish glee when they all, or almost all, were caught by *The Ballad to the Moon.* He laughed like a downright giddypate, without mercy, in the *Secret Thoughts of Rafael,* at their great outlay of indignation at a mere pleasantry:

" They say, O masters, that your eyebrow, as it saw that moon, that dot o'er the i, assumed the look, the frightful look, of a circumflex!"

The Parisian journalist accepts, if it must be, the fate of being called pedant, or even silly, besotted pedant. But nothing in the world is more hateful to him, more intolerable, exasperating, unforgettable, than to be convicted of credulity. The critics of 1830 long maintained their ill will for the young gentleman who " quizzed everybody."

No more coteries to defend him, for he had fallen out with the Cenacle, and the new volume was really hard to understand. Of the three poems composing it, not one was accessible to the many unaided by commentary. The *Cup and the Lips* was at first glance astonishing through its unusual form. The chorus, borrowed from the Greek tragedy and expressing ideas by no means antique in a modern language, troubled and confounded the reader. Further, the basis and conception of the piece is far from being distinct. Various rather inconsistent ideas follow one another, and are mingled in confusion. Without noticing it himself, the author glides from his original theme into another and quite different subject. In the first act he seems to have designed to construct a tragedy of pride as Corneille wrought the tragedy of the will, and to have endeavored to display the growth of pride

in a strong and ardent soul: "All, even patience, comes to us from pride."

But what next? Frank, who was plunging into life with so much pride and vainglory, meets in the forest Belcolore, and she says to him, "Mount your horse and come to supper with me," and the subject changes all of a sudden. Frank is now the man whom excess has contaminated in the very bloom of youth, and who carries its blight in his heart. "Hapless the man when excess drives a first nail in his left breast!"

Musset again and again has come back to this thought, and at all times with an accent of stinging pain which betrays self-examination and harsh regret.

In the fifth act, the graceful idyl of Deidamia causes the subject to deviate anew, and terminates the drama with a romanesque event—a pure accident, unless we accept the interpretation given by M. Faguet of the denouement of the *Cup and the Lips,* which interpretation is very interesting, because it omits the accident and restores to the poem the unity which was lacking. According to him, Frank "returns to his boyhood's love as to a rebirth and to a redemption . . . and is unable to regain it, for Belcolore—here to be understood as a symbol for the specter of debauchery—watches him, attracts him, slays him. . . ."

Whatever the truth as to this may be, Frank,

of all Musset's heroes, is the most Byronic; and this is singular, for Musset, in the very dedication to the *Cup,* defended himself against the charge of giving way to the influence of Manfreds and Laras.

Byronicism was a shred of the romantic mantle of which he never got rid. It was in vain that he flung it away; the gaudy rag would suddenly come back to his shoulders. We are to see it again in all its glitter when Musset writes *Rolla* and the *Confession.*

A public which had not lent attention to the grand and tragic imaginings of the *Cup* was hardly fit to relish that pearl of poesy which is entitled *Of What Young Maidens Dream.* We must have a lively fancy ourselves, or have been put to school in the fairy-world of Shakespeare, to accept without hesitating the improbable idea of Laertes, the prudent father who sings serenades under the balcony of his daughters in order that they may have their little romance before the expediency match, such as families have made since time began. But yet see how far old Laertes was in the right. No one seconds him. The two suitors who should attend to serenades and love-letters are, the one too bashful, the other too dull. Irus is quite silly, Silvio is a nobody, and they both hamper Laertes instead of profiting by his lessons and climbing up the silken ladder into the azure land. But such is the force

of a sound idea that everything is settled in spite of everything, as the old Duke had foreseen. Ninon and Ninette had breathed the poetry of love before devoting themselves, like nice, good little girls, to the prose of marriage. For a whole evening they will have been poets themselves, and so risen one round in the scale of created beings. Ninon exclaims, "Earth, winds, and waters fill with harmonies," and Ninette, "Ye palm-leaves scattering love upon the burning breeze!"

In this little piece there is an invigorating grace. Never before had any one lent more exquisite language to young and ingenuous love. The duet between Ninon and Silvio, on the terrace, was an act of faith which the *Tales* had not led the reader to expect, in favor of chaste and tender passion, the treasure of pure hearts. More than once has the poet come back to the theme, a thing which has always brought him good-luck.

In the last poem, *Namouna,* the tone changed again, and did not cease to change—now cynical, now eloquent and passionate, now filled with emotion. Musset had put himself into it, and we know whether he was of "infinite variety." He abandoned himself to his fickle moods, especially in the tirade on Don Juan. He related his own dream in those glittering strophes which paint the handsome stripling as "loving, loved of all, and open as a flower," whom the deification of sensation condemns to a forlorn search

after an impossible ideal, and who dies with a smile on his lips, "full of hope in his ending path." These Don Juans unluckily are likely to turn into Rollas, and when Musset saw that it was too late, and he could only cry out with anguish like Frank.

The *Spectacle,* it is to be noticed, contains hardly any broken lines or verses passing into those following, except in *Namouna.* Musset's form becomes a compromise between the new school and the old. Poverty of rime he erects more and more into a system. "You will find, dear friend, my rimes very poor." He disowns the obligatory local color, manufactured with Travelers' Guides. "Bear in mind," he says, "that I have filched nothing from the Library."

Musset, better than any one else, knew the value of local color drawn out of the guide-book. He had just been working up his description of the Tyrol in the *Cup,* by means of an old geographical dictionary.

He had broken then with his own romantic audacities, but for all that he was by no means reconciled with the classicals, whom he continued to chaff: "Body and soul shall go two by two, like yoked oxen or classical verses." Placed here between the two camps, nothing was left him but to remain himself. Though lacking a people of worshipers, he had his own handful of faithful admirers—those who, from the out-

set, had discerned the personal accent amid borrowed notes, asked the author of *Don Juan* to be Musset, still Musset, ever Musset. His mother relates, in a letter written in 1834, that a dancing-partner of his sister, a polytechnic, said to her: "Mademoiselle, they tell me that you are a sister of M. Alfred de Musset." "Yes, sir, I have the honor." "You are very fortunate, mademoiselle." Madame de Musset-Pathay adds that the Polytechnic School swears only by him. At the moment when Madame de Musset-Pathay was tracing these lines, the youth of her son was over. He was twenty-three. The six years elapsed since his leaving college had been by no means heavy years. They are all summed up in one of his songs, a poem smiling and melancholy: "To my heart I said, is it not enough to love my love?" He answers, "Ceaseless changing lends sweetness unto passing joys."

The period of happy recklessness has gone by. We come to the great crisis of Musset's life. He is to love truly for the first time, and is not to find that love's woes are "sweet and dear."

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE SAND

GEORGE SAND to Sainte-Beuve (March, 1833): "By the way, after reflection, I wish you not to bring Alfred de Musset. He is too much of a dandy, we should not agree, and I should be more curious than interested to see him. I think it imprudent to satisfy all one's curiosities and better to obey one's sympathies. So, instead of him, I will ask you to bring Dumas, in whose art I have found soul, to say nothing of talent."

Some time after, Alfred de Musset and George Sand met at a dinner given by the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. They were seated side by side, and agreed to meet again. Letters of Musset without date—I have them under my eyes—form a sort of prologue to the drama. The two are not beyond ceremonious formulas and commonplace courtesies. The first letter to mark an advance in intimacy was written about *Lélia*, which George Sand had sent to Musset. He returns warm thanks, and through his compliments he lets slip the avowal that he would be most happy to be admitted to the rank of comrade. The "Madame" disappears forthwith from the correspondence. He grows bold, and

declares himself, first very nicely and the second time with passion, and destiny is fulfilled for them both. Without circumlocution she announces to Sainte-Beuve that she is Musset's mistress, adding that he may tell anybody; she asks no discretion on his part. In this relation, she goes on, " far from being distressed and misunderstood, I find a candor, an integrity, a tenderness which intoxicates me. Truly a young man's love and a comrade's friendship, a something of which I had no idea, which I did not expect to meet anywhere, and above all in this. This affection I denied, repelled, refused at first, and then I surrendered, and now I am happy for having done so. I surrendered more from friendship than through love, and the friendship which I never knew has revealed itself to me without one of the pangs I expected to suffer." (August 25, 1833.)

" I have been sick, but I am well now. And more, I am happy, very happy, my friend. Every day I bind myself more closely to *him;* every day I see those little things in him fade away which once made me suffer; every day I behold the beautiful things of my admiration gleam and shine in him. And again, above all that he is, he is a kind fellow, and this familiar friendship is as delightful as his preference was precious." (September 21st.)

At the end of September she writes: " In *Lélia*

I blasphemed nature, and perhaps God. God, who is not cruel, and whose nature is not to take vengeance on us, has closed my mouth by restoring to me the youth of the heart, forcing me to confess that he has bestowed upon us joys which are sublime."

Such was the opening of this famous liaison which, in a biography of Alfred de Musset, is not to be passed over in silence, not for the ignoble pleasure of stirring over again a mess of idle gossip and of scandal, nor because it involves two famous writers, but because it exercised a decisive influence upon Musset, and also because it affords an unique and extraordinary example of what the romantic spirit could do with beings who had fallen a prey to it. The correspondence of these illustrious lovers, in which we follow step by step the ravages of the monster, is one of the most precious psychological documents of the first part of the last century. We follow in it the mad and painful endeavors of a man and a woman of genius to live the sentiments of a literature which sought its heroes outside of all reality, and to exist as much above or beyond nature as Hernani or Lélia. Nature is seen avenging herself severely on those who have offended her, and condemning them to reciprocal tortures. Following this correspondence, we shall essay to recount a history which may be called unknown, though the subject of so much

talk, for all who have busied themselves therewith have undertaken to disfigure it. Paul de Musset designedly travesties the facts in his Biography. *Elle et Lui,* George Sand's book, and Paul de Musset's answer, *Lui et Elle,* are works of rancor, born of a state of war caused and kept up by friends, full of good purposes, without doubt, but certainly very badly inspired. Even the letters of George Sand printed in her *Correspondence* have been mutilated to suit the needs of her cause. Not one of those about the two reflected, that by belittling the *other* he was making his own hero equally small.

During the earlier months they had no need of letters, but Musset has filled this gap in the *Confession,* the last three parts of which are the picture—pitiless for himself, triumphant for his mistress—of his life with George Sand. In these he never spared himself. His serious defects of character, his offenses from the very first, are depicted in them with a kind of fury, and with what truth, an unpublished fragment by George Sand bears witness: " I tell you, this *Confession* has stirred me deeply, in fact. The smallest details of an unhappy intimacy are so faithfully, so minutely set down, from the first hour to the last, from the sister of charity to the proud *insensée,* that on closing the book I burst into tears like a silly creature." (To Madame d'Agoult, May 25, 1836.)

Having put all the wrongdoing upon himself, he poetized the conclusion. Let us call to mind, reread this story moving on with breathless swiftness: we shall see, day by day, hour by hour, the steps of this anguish and adoration, summed up in the cry of distress uttered by George Sand at the moment of their rupture: "Enough of you, I wish no more; yet I cannot live without you!" (To Musset, February or March, 1835.) And the more we read, the clearer the eye sees that what was to happen inevitably came to pass. Each of them wished and exacted the impossible. Musset, for the first time in his life, was passionately in love, but behind him was a libertine past which clung to him like a Nessus shirt, and constrained his intelligence to torture his heart. Like Portia's sinner, "he did not believe," and he felt a despairing need of believing. He dreamed of a love above all other loves—to be at once a delirium and a worship. Well he understood that neither of them had reached such a point, but he could not be reconciled, passing his time trying to scale the heaven and falling back into the mire, until he conceived ill will against George Sand for his own defeat. A quarter of an hour after having treated her "as an idol, as a divinity," he insulted her with jealous suspicions, with outrageous questions concerning her past. "A quarter of an hour after affronting her, I was on my knees; as soon as I ceased to accuse,

I was begging pardon. Then a delirium unheard of before, a fever of delight, would seize hold of me; I would almost lose my reason by the violence of my transports of joy; I knew not what to do, what to say, what to imagine, in order to repair the harm which I had done. I would take Brigitte in my arms, and I would make her repeat a hundred times, a thousand times, that she loved me and forgave me. Then outbursts would last whole nights, during which I never ceased to speak, to weep, to grovel at her feet, to intoxicate myself with a boundless passion, as enervating as insensate." The day brought doubt back, for the divinity was only a woman whom genius did not shelter from human weakness, and who, like him, had a past. There were beautiful and glowing suns between the whirlwinds. Musset, repentant, grew gentle and submissive as a child. He was all tenderness, all respect. He would make his mistress live among adorations, would exalt her above all creatures, and intoxicate her with a passion of such violence as to fling him pale and fainting at her feet. He is mute in his rage at himself; as to these dead calms, he says: "Those were happy days: of them we are not to speak," and he passes on.

George Sand—she also struggled against a chimera and the reality. She had constructed for herself regarding Musset, who was six years her junior, a half-motherly ideal which she

thought very lofty, and which was only very false. She drew from this a proud compassion for her "poor child," so weak and unreasonable, and she caused him to feel somewhat overmuch her superiority as a guardian angel. She would scold him with infinite gentleness and reason (in their letters she always had reason on her side), but this impeccable voice ended by irritating Musset. He could not refrain from an ironical smile, a bantering allusion, and the storm broke out again.

Nevertheless, both cherished their chains, because the sweetness of hours of serenity appeared far greater than the bitterness of the evil time. Some astonished friends blamed them. They were meddling in what? George Sand answered with great common sense to one of the indiscreet: "There are so many things between two lovers of which they alone can be judges!"

The autumn of 1833 was interrupted by the excursion to Fontainebleau, which they have celebrated in turn and cursed in verse and prose. December saw them on the way to Italy together. The stories of this journey, and of its sequel, have so little connection with the reality that here we must be specific and fix the dates, in order, once for all, to restore the truth and the fact. The heroes in the drama—we cannot repeat this too often—have only to gain, by light dispelling obscurity.

On the 22d of December they embarked at Marseilles, made a short stop at Genoa, another at Florence, and on the 28th or 29th they were off again for Venice, where they arrived in the early part of January. George Sand had been sick since they were in Genoa, and on the very day of their reaching Venice she took to her bed, where the fever kept her for two weeks. On January 28th she is at last enabled to report to her friend Boucoiran that she is doing well, physically and morally, "but this is a mere respite." On the 4th of February she writes again: "I have just been sick again, for five days, with a frightful dysentery. My traveling companion is very sick, too. This we do not boast of, because we have in Paris a crowd of enemies who would be glad of it. They would say, 'They have been in Italy for amusement, but now they have the cholera! What a pleasure for us! They are sick!' Next, Madame de Musset would be in despair if she were to learn of her son's sickness, so not a whisper! He is not in a disquieting state, but it is very sad to see one whom we love, and who is generally so kind and so cheerful, in a languishing and suffering condition. So, then, my heart is troubled, like my stomach." Musset was at the beginning of his great malady. The two lovers had just had their first falling out, which does not mean that they had ceased to see each other. Musset's album, which is still

extant, does not for an instant omit representing George Sand—now in traveling garb, now in home attire, as an Oriental smoking her pipe, or a tourist bargaining for some trinket. On one page she is looking roguishly at Musset across her fan, on another she is smoking a cigarette very serenely. We turn, keep on turning, and there she is always, and two lines of Musset, almost the last that he published, come back to mind:

> O memory importunate
> Take those eyes away that I must ever see.

Nevertheless, they were at odds. Musset had been violent and brutal. He had brought tears from those great, dark eyes which haunted him until his death, and he had not run in haste a quarter of an hour afterward to beg forgiveness. His sickness caused all to be forgotten. In their romance, it opens a new chapter, which is touching to the point of absurdity.

On the 5th of February he is suddenly in danger. "I am consumed with anxieties, overcome with fatigue, sick, and in despair. Keep absolute silence as to Alfred's sickness because of his mother, who would hear of it infallibly, and die of grief." (To Boucoiran.)

On the 8th she writes to the same correspondent: "He is really in danger. The brain nerves are attacked so violently that his delirium is

frightful and uninterrupted. To-day, however, there is an extraordinary improvement. Reason has returned fully, and his tranquillity is perfect. But last night it was horrible. Six hours of such frenzy that, in spite of two strong men, he ran about the room naked. Cries, songs, howling, convulsions—O God! what a spectacle!"

Musset owed his life to the devotion of George Sand and of a young physician named Pagello. Hardly was he convalescent when the vertigo of the sublime and the impossible seized the lovers once more. They conceived the most fantastic deviations of sentiment, and their home was the theater of scenes which in novelty exceeded the most daring pranks in contemporary literature. Musset, always eager to make atonement, sacrificed himself to Pagello, who in turn had yielded to the fascination of the great, dark eyes. Pagello became a partner with George Sand in recompensing the voluntary and heroic victim by means of a "holy friendship." George Sand reminds Musset, in a letter of the next summer, how simple that all appeared to them. "I loved him like a father, and you were the child of us both." She recalls to him, also, their solemn emotions "when at Venice you extorted from him the avowal of his love for me, and he swore to make me happy. Oh! that night of enthusiasm when, in spite of us, you joined our hands and said, 'You love each other, and yet you love me;

me you have saved—body and soul.' " They had dragged the good Pagello along, ignorant as he was even of the name of romanticism, in their ascent toward madness. He said to George Sand, with tender feeling, " our love for Alfred." George Sand repeated it to Musset, who shed tears of enthusiastic joy on hearing it.

Still Pagello kept some remnant of good sense. As a physician, he judged that the state of chronic exaltation which did not hinder Musset from being in love—quite the contrary—was of no advantage to a man hardly recovering from brain fever. He recommended a separation, which came to pass on April 1st or March 31st, Musset departing for France. On the 6th George Sand gives to her friend Boucoiran, in a confidential letter, the medical reasons for this decision, and she adds: " He was still too delicate to undertake this long journey, and I am not free from anxiety as to the manner in which he will endure it. But it was more injurious for him to stay than to go, and every day devoted to awaiting the return of health delayed, instead of accelerating it. We have parted, perhaps for some months, perhaps forever. Heaven knows now what will become of my head and my heart. I feel that I have strength to live, to work, to suffer."

" The manner in which I became separated from Alfred gave me much to think about. It

was a delight to me to see this man—so frivolous, an unbelieving atheist—in love; so incapable (so it seemed to me at first) of earnest attachment, become good, affectionate, and true from day to day. While at times I suffered from the differences of our characters, and above all the disparity of our ages, still more often I have had reason to glory in the other bonds uniting us. There is in him a fund of affection, kindness, and sincerity which ought to make him adorable to all those who may know him well and not judge him by his lighter conduct." "I doubt our ever becoming lovers again. We made no promises as to this, but we shall always love each other, and life's sweetest moments will be those which we can pass together."

Musset writes to Venice, on all the stages of the journey, letters which are marvels of passion and delicacy, of pathetic eloquence and thrilling poetry. Here and there is an emphatic stress, a declamatory touch, but that was the taste of the time and, so to speak, the poetic of this style of composition.

He writes to her that he deserved to lose her, because he knew not how to honor her when he possessed her, and because he has caused her deep suffering. At night, in his room at the inns, he shed tears, and is nevertheless almost happy, almost joyful because he can relish the bliss of sacrifice. He has left her in the hands of a man

of heart who will render her happy, and he is full of gratitude to this noble fellow; he loves her, cannot refrain from tears as he thinks of her. She may try to be but an endeared brother to the absent, it will be in vain, for she will forever remain his one and only mistress.

George Sand to Musset (April 3d): "Do not be anxious about me; I am strong as a horse; but do not tell me to be cheerful and calm. That will not come so soon. Ah! who will take care of you, and of whom shall I take care? Who will have need of me, and henceforth whom shall I nurse? *How shall I do without the good and the evil which you did me?*

"Think not, Alfred, that I can be happy in the thought of having lost your heart. It matters but little whether I have been your mistress or your mother! Whether I have inspired you with love or friendship, whether I have been happy or unhappy with you, are all questions that make no change in the state of my soul now. I know that I love you now, and that is all." (April 15th.)

Her question is how could so maternal an affection engender all this bitterness: "Why have I, who was ready to give you all my blood to bring you one night of rest and calm, become a torment to you, a plague, a specter? When these frightful memories beset me (and at what hour do they leave me in peace?), I become insane

almost, and cover my pillow with tears, hearing your voice calling me in the silence of the night. Now who shall call me? Who shall have need of my watchings? In what shall I use the strength which I have gathered for you, and which now is turning against me? Oh, my child, my child! How I need your affection and your forgiveness! Speak not of mine, never call yourself guilty toward me. How much do I know about the past? No more than this do I remember, that we have been very unhappy and we have parted. But I know, I feel, that we shall love each other to the end of life. . . . The feeling which binds us is closed against so many things that it cannot be compared to any other. The world will never understand it in the least. So much the better! We shall love each other, and we shall laugh in its face!

"I am living almost alone. Pagello comes to dine with me. I spend the most delicious moments of the day with him talking of you! He has so much feeling and kindness, and understands my sadness so well! He respects it religiously!"

Her letters were more generous than prudent. They acted powerfully upon a tender sensitiveness already too much excited by disease. Musset had reached Paris on April 12th, and had at once plunged head first into society and its pleasures, hoping that diversion would put an end to

the sorrow which was wasting him away. On the 19th he begs his love not to write to him any more in such a tone, and rather to tell him of her present happiness; this is the only thought which revives his courage. On the 30th he thanks her with rapture for maintaining her love for him, and blesses her for her beneficent influence. He has already renounced the life of pleasure, and to his *grand George* he owes the strength to have done so. She has uplifted him; she has torn him from his evil past; she has revived faith in a heart knowing only how to deny and to blaspheme; if ever he achieves anything great, he will owe it all to her.

He continues his talk about Pagello, going so far as to say, "When I beheld that worthy Pagello, I recognized in him the good part of myself, but pure, free from the incurable taints which poisoned it in me. This is the reason why I discerned that I must depart." However, we may note a faint change in his friendship for Pagello as soon as he has come home to Paris. It seems that in setting forth again in that jeering city, he conceived a vague suspicion that the "ideal bond," of which all three were so proud, might be a mistake, a ridiculous mistake.

On the ensuing page he makes confession of childishness. He has found a little broken comb used by George Sand, and goes everywhere with that bit of wreckage in his pocket. Farther on:

"I am going to write a novel on it. I should so much like to write our history. It seems to me that that would cure me, and lift up my heart. I would fain build you an altar, were it with my bones."

This plan resulted in the *Confession of a Child of the Century.* George Sand, on her side, had already begun to work the mine of souvenirs. The first, the *Letters of a Traveler,* was finished, and announced to Musset. We now shall have, down to the end of the tragedy, something like a faint smell of printer's ink. We must resign ourselves; it is the ransom for the loves of literary folk, to be settled even with Musset, who was as little of an author as could be.

The letters from Venice continued to throw oil on the fire. George Sand could not contrive to hide the fact that memory of the turning, tumultuous passion of yore was rendering present pleasure very flat. To Pagello she was grateful, and he was all care and attention. "He is an angel of sweetness, goodness, and devotion." But life with him was a trifle colorless in comparison. "I was not used to enthusiasm, and sometimes I miss it. Here I am not Madame Sand; my worthy Pietro has not read *Lélia,* and I believe he would never understand a syllable of it. For the first time I love without passion. Pagello is neither suspicious nor nervous. Great qualities, and still— Oh, I need to suffer for

some one! I need to use this surplus energy and sensibility which are in me. I need to nourish this motherly anxiety which is wont to watch over a suffering and fatigued creature. Oh! why could I not live between you two, and render you happy without belonging to one or the other?" She would like to make the acquaintance of Musset's future mistress; she would perchance teach her to love and cherish him. But perhaps that mistress will be jealous? "Ah! at least I can speak of you at any moment and never see a brow darkened, never hear one bitter word. Your memory is a sacred relic, your name a solemn word which I pronounce at evening in the silence of the lagoon."

Pagello writes to De Musset on June 15th: "Dear Alfred, we have not yet written to each other, perhaps because neither wished to begin. But that takes naught from the reciprocal affection which will always bind us in bonds sublime, though not to be understood by other men."

Cries of love were the answer to the avowals of the faithless one. From May 10th Musset writes that he is lost, that all is crumbling round him, that he passes hours in weeping, kissing her portrait, and addressing mad speeches to her. To him Paris seems a frightful desert; he wishes to leave it, and flee even to the Orient. He accuses himself of having misunderstood her, loved her ill; anew he drags himself in the mire,

and builds an altar to the celestial being, the great genius, once his and now lost through his fault. This is the moment when his soul, all in a fever, opens itself to the comprehension of Rousseau: "I am reading Werther and the Nouvelle Heloise. I am devouring all those sublime frenzies which I used to ridicule so much. I shall perhaps go too far in this direction as in the other. What do I care for that? I shall keep on." He feels an imperious and terrible need to make her understand that she is happy. This alone soothes his grief.

On June 26th she writes renouncing her intention to bring Pagello, and advises Musset to make light of gossip. "What might harm me, but what cannot happen, would be the loss of your affection. What shall console me for all possible ills is that. Think, my child, that you are in my life, by the side of my children, and that but two great causes exist to crush me—their death or your indifference."

Musset writes on the 10th of July: "'Tell me, sir, is it true that Madame Sand is a woman, and an "adorable one"?' Such is the honest question which a fair and silly person put to me the other day. The dear creature has repeated it not less than three times, to see whether I would vary my answers. 'Crow, chanticleer!' I said quietly to myself; 'you will not deny like St. Peter.'"

The coming of Pagello to Paris was the awk-

ward blunder which spoiled everything. Things there are which in a gondola, between poets, seem almost natural, and which will not bear a journey. The return of Musset, alone and disabled, had already occasioned spiteful gossip, which he had vainly striven to check. George Sand had failed to hush her friends also. She kept saying to them: "This is the only passion of which I do not repent." But people were sure they knew better than she, quite as usual, and tongues wagged at the same rate as ever. A rumbling of evil-speaking rose from the Boulevard de Gand and from the Café de Paris. It rose to a clamor on the entrance of the accomplice—poor, innocent fellow—in the overflow of romanticism inspired by the Place St. Mark and the feverish air of the lagoons. The situation appeared in all its extravagance, and the three friends were rudely torn from their dream by the jeers of the idle simpletons. The three suffered painful annoyance when they had to face a reality which was so mean and almost degrading.

George Sand and her comrade had scarcely arrived—it was about midnight—when a great agitation seized them all. With Musset it was an awakening of passion to which the consciousness of the irreparable communicates sadness without bounds. He writes to George Sand, that in daring to see her again he has presumed too far on his strength, and that he is lost. The

only course left him is to go very far away. Let her have no fear. In him exists no jealousy, conceit, or offended pride. There is nothing but a despairing man who had lost the only love of his life, and who is bringing away with him bitter regret at having lost it to no purpose, because it leaves her unhappy.

She in fact was wasting away with disappointment. Pagello, as he changed atmosphere, had opened his eyes to the ridiculous side of the situation. "From the moment when he set foot on French soil," wrote George Sand, "he ceased to comprehend things." Instead of that sacred enthusiasm of yore, he felt nothing but irritation when his two friends called him as a witness to the chastity of their kisses: "Look at him; he is becoming a weakling once more—suspicious, unfair, quarreling about nothing, and dropping on your head all-smashing stones." In his anxiety he opens letters, blabs and scolds without discretion. George Sand contemplated with horror the shipwreck of her illusions. She had assumed that the world would understand that their history was not to judge by the rules of vulgar morality. But the world cannot admit that there are privileged characters, or, to speak with more exactness, people dispensed in morals. She read condemnation on all countenances, and for whom, great heavens! For this insignificant Italian, of whom she now was ashamed.

Six months ago they were all in a false position, laboring to deceive themselves and to transfigure a commonplace adventure. They were destined to pay a dear price for their misdeeds.

George Sand consented to a last adieu to her friend; not without difficulty, for an instinct warned her that it would all be worthless. Next day Musset wrote to her: "I send this last farewell, my well beloved, and I send it with confidence, not without pain, but without despair. Cruel anguish, keen struggles, bitter tears have given place in me to a very dear companion—pale and sweet melancholy. This morning, after a tranquil night, I found her by the head of my bed, with a gentle smile upon her lips. This is the friend who is going with me. She bears on her brow your last kiss. Why should I fear to say so to you? Was it not as chaste, as pure as your lovely soul? O my well beloved, you will never reproach me with those two hours—hours so sad—which we spent! You will treasure their memory. They poured a healing balm upon my wound; you will not repent having left your poor friend a keepsake which he will ever bear, and which all sorrows, all joys in the future will find like a talisman upon his heart between the world and him. Our friendship is consecrated, my child. Yesterday it received before God the holy baptism of our tears. It is as invulnerable as baptism. I fear nothing, I hope

for nothing. I am done on this earth. It was not reserved for me to have a greater pleasure."

Next he begs leave to continue writing to her; he will bear anything without complaint provided he knows that she is content: "Be happy; have courage, patience, pity; try to vanquish that well-grounded pride; narrow your heart, big George, yours is too great for a human breast. But if you make renunciation of life, if you ever find yourself alone in the face of misfortune, recall the oath which you swore, do not die without me. Remember that you promised before God. But I shall not die without having written a book upon myself—upon you, above all. No, my fair betrothed; you shall not lie down in this chill earth without its knowing it has borne you. No, no; I swear it by my genius and by my youth, on your tomb shall spring only lilies without stain. With these hands I will set your epitaph in marble purer than the images of our glories of bygone days. Posterity shall repeat our names as those of the immortal lovers who have but one to them both, such as Romeo and Juliet, such as Heloise and Abelard. Men shall never speak of one without the other. I will finish your history with a hymn of love."

The calmness of this letter was deceitful. He set out for Baden toward August 25th, stopped at Strasburg on the 28th, and immediately came explosions of passion, burning and insensate let-

ters. He writes from Baden, September 1, 1834: "Never did man love as I love you. I am lost; behold! I am drowned, overwhelmed with love." He no longer knows whether he lives, eats, walks, breathes, or speaks; he only knows that he loves, that he can do no more, that he is dying, and that it is frightful to die of love, to feel one's heart shrink and shrink till it ceases to beat, one's eyes grow dim, and knees quake. He can neither hold his peace nor say aught else: "I love you, my flesh and my bones and my blood. Of love I am dying, and of a love endless, nameless, insensate, desperate, beyond redemption. You are loved, adored, idolized to death. No; I shall not get well, I shall not attempt to live, and I prefer it so; and to die loving you is worth more than to live. I am, indeed, concerned at what people say. They will say that you have another lover, I know. I am dying with it, but I love—I love. Let them stop me from loving!" Why separate? What is there between us? Phrases, phantoms of duty. Let her come for him or let her tell him to come. But no; always these phrases, these pretended duties. And she is allowing him to die of the thirst she has for him!

A little farther down in the same letter a reflection, very wise, but belated: "We ought not to see each other again. Now all is finished. To myself I said that I ought to find another love, forget yours, have courage. I essayed; I endeav-

ored, at the least." It is impossible at the present moment, now that he has seen her again; he prefers suffering to life.

Just as he is retiring far from Paris, George Sand flees to Nohant, as if maddened. The letters which she sends to friends are the plaintive cries of a wounded animal. She writes to Gustave Papet: "Come to see me; I am in frightful pain. Come and give me an eloquent grasp of your hand, my poor friend. If I can recover, I will pay all my debts to friendship; for I have neglected it, and it has not forsaken me." To Boucoiran she says: "Nohant, August 10.—All my friends have come. I experienced great pleasure in being there again. It was a farewell which I came to say to my home and to all the memories of my youth and childhood, for you must have understood and divined this: that my life is hateful, ruined, impossible, and I wish to have done with it forthwith. I shall have to talk fully with you, and to charge you with the execution of sacred purposes. Don't lecture me beforehand. When we have spoken for an hour together, when I have made you see the state of my brain and my heart, you will say with me that it is weak cowardice to try to live, so long has it been my duty to have done with existence."

And Pagello? They had left him all alone in Paris, and he was in a very bad temper. He

thought it very wrong that they should have brought him two hundred and fifty leagues to make him play such a silly part.

George Sand writes to Musset in pencil, and without dating—in a word, paper on her knees: "Alas! what means all that? Why forget at every moment, and this time more than ever, that this feeling ought to transform itself and no longer have the power, of its own nature, to give umbrage to man or woman. Ah! you still love me too well; we must never meet again. What you express is passion, but no longer the sacred enthusiasm of better moments, no longer that uncontaminated friendship of which I hoped to see those excessive expressions die away little by little." She reveals to him the painful condition of relations with Pagello: "Everything from me wounds and irritates him, and—must I tell you? —he is going, perhaps already gone; and as for me, I shall not hold him back; he has no more faith, consequently no more affection. If he is still in Paris, I shall see him, as I am going to return to console him; justify myself, no; detain him, no. And yet I loved him, heartily and earnestly, this generous fellow, who is as romanesque as I am—stronger, I thought, than I."

All through the month of September they continued devouring their hearts in reciprocal torture. Neither had strength enough to break loose. October brought them together, and they

resumed the endeavor to believe, the struggle to put faith in each other and in the cleansing virtue of love. Days wore away in harassing alternatives. Musset, having kept fewer illusions of the past than George Sand, felt a nausea rise to his lips amid protesting oaths of love. His disgust would turn to wrath, and he would overwhelm his friend with insults. Hardly had he left her when reality faded away before his eyes, and he beheld nothing but the chimera which their inflamed imaginations had bred. He got pardon and grace by dint of eloquence and despair, and both began anew to roll their stone, which again tumbled back upon their heads. Musset, on the 13th of October, 1834, thanks George Sand, in a gentle, sad letter, for consenting to see him again. On the 28th, Pagello, a man not made for tragedies and beginning now to be frightened, without knowing why, announces his departure to Alfred Tattet, conjuring him never to say one word about these amours with George. "I don't want," he adds, "any *vendette*." George Sand writes, without dating, to Musset: "I was sure that the reproaches would come on the morrow of the happiness dreamed of and promised, and you would make a crime of what you had accepted as a right. Have we already come to that—my God! Well, we must go no farther; let me depart. Yesterday I desired to go; it is a farewell forever settled in my

mind. Recall your despair and all you said to make me believe myself necessary to you, believe that without me you were a lost man. And once again, I have been mad enough to want to save you. But you are lost more than of old, since hardly were you contented when you turned your despair and anger on me. What can I do, good heavens? What are you asking now? What are you demanding of me? Questions, suspicions, recriminations already!" She reminds him of the harm done her in Venice, the offensive or distressing things which he had said, and for the first time her language is bitter. She had foreseen what is at hand. "That past which exalted you like a beautiful poem as long as I refused myself, and which seems to you no more than a nightmare now that you again seize upon me like your prey." That past was infallibly to make him suffer. Separation was an absolute necessity. They would both alike be too unhappy. "What have we left of a bond that seemed so fair to both? Neither love nor friendship—*mon Dieu!*"

A letter which seems to have crossed the above, betrays a still greater anguish. He is in consternation over what he has done. He understands nothing; it is the onset of madness. Hardly had he gone three paces in the street when reason came back, and he nearly fell when he recalled the memory of his ingratitude and of his stupid

brutality. He deserves no forgiveness, but so unhappy is he that she will pity him. She shall impose a penance and leave him hope, for, in truth, his reason would not resist the thought of losing her. Once more he paints his love with a passionate ardor which makes these letters the *Nights* in prose.

She relents and forgives. Musset is intoxicated with bliss. They meet, and George Sand takes up her pen in discouragement: "Why were we so sad at our separation? Shall we meet again to-night? Can we love? You said yes, and I strive to believe it. But it seems to me that there is no coherence in your ideas, and that at the slightest trouble you rise in indignation against me as against a yoke. Alas! my child, we love—here you see the only certain thing between us. Time and absence have not prevented, and will not prevent, us from loving each other. But is our life possible together?" She proposes that they separate for good and all; that in every way would be wiser. "I feel that I shall love you again as before, if I do not run away. Perhaps I may kill you and myself too. Think of this. I wished to tell you beforehand all there was to fear between us. I ought to have written and not come back. Fatality brings me here again. Must we bless or accuse it? There are hours, I avow, when terror is stronger than love."

Musset was the first to tire. The rupture came

from him. On the 12th of October he announces it to Alfred Tattet. Sainte-Beuve, then George Sand's confidant, was officially informed also. Everything ought to have been over and done with, and yet past tempests are nothing less than naught compared to those now brewing. It might be said that one of those pitiless punishments, wherein the ancients recognized the hand of the divinity, had come, so that now we feel only compassion for the wretches who writhe in anguish with cries of pain.

George Sand had gone home to Nohant, and at the very first had felt a sense of deliverance and of repose: "I am pretty well, diverting myself, and I shall come up to Paris only when cured and strengthened. I read your note to Duteil. You are wrong in speaking so of Alf. Don't say anything about him, as you love him, and be assured that between him and me all is over."

This was, however, nothing but a calm. The tone of her letters changes very soon. On the 25th of December, 1834, she writes from Paris to Musset: "But still I am not getting well. I am giving over to my despair. It is gnawing, crushing me. Alas! Every day it grows like this dreadful isolation, these struggles of my heart, to rejoin the heart once open to me! And if I ran, when love seizes me with too great a force? If I were to go and break the bell-cord,

to make him open his door to me? If I lay down by the threshold until he passed? If I flung myself, not at his feet—mere madness, after all, for that would be an entreaty, and surely he is doing all he can for me; it is cruel to beset him and demand the impossible—but if I flung myself on his neck, into his arms, and said, 'You love me still, you are suffering, blushing, but you pity me too much not to love me'? Whensoever you feel your tenderness growing weary and your irritation coming back, drive me away, maltreat me, but never be it with those frightful words—the last time! I shall suffer as much as you desire, but permit me sometimes, were it but once in the week, to come asking for one tear, one kiss, to give me life and courage. But you cannot. Ah! you are sick of me, and you have been cured of it very quickly too. Alas! I was certainly more guilty than you at Venice."

Her turn to accuse herself, and to implore forgiveness. Her pride is crushed. She takes a bitter pleasure in humbly eating her own words and justifying the worst insults from Musset. But has the lesson not been hard enough? "Friday.—In vain I call anger to help me. I love; I shall die of it, or God will work a miracle for me. He will give me literary ambition or spiritual devotion. Midnight; I cannot work. Isolation, solitude! I can neither write nor pray—would I could die; who shall hinder me? O my

poor children, how unhappy your mother is!" "Saturday, midnight.—Maniac, you forsake me at the fairest hour of my life, on my love's truest, most passionate day, when my heart is bleeding the most violently! Is it naught to have tamed a woman's pride and to have flung her at your feet, naught to know that she is dying of it? Torment of my life! Deadly love! I would give all that I have lived for a single day of your flood-tide. But never! It is too frightful, atrocious! I cannot believe that, and I am going there, I am. No! Shriek or howl—but I must not go; Sainte-Beuve forbids!"

Exaltation soars to delirium. The famous letters of the Portuguese Nun are lukewarm and tame beside some of these pages, which may be accounted among the most fiery that love has ever extorted from a woman. She wallows at his feet, begging him to kick her—in lack of a better gift: "I would rather have a blow than nothing"—and jumbling up her supplications with reproaches addressed to God for abandoning her at this crisis, she offers a bargain to the Most High: "Ah! restore my lover to me, and I will be a devout and godly woman, and my knees shall wear away the churches' pavement-stones."

And this was not all mere words: she cut her magnificent hair, and sent it to Musset. She came to his house, and wept at the door or on

the stairway. She roamed about like a soul in torments, her eyes ringed, despair on her face.

Musset loved her still. He could not resist. George Sand, on January 14, 1835, writes to Tattet: "Alfred is my lover once more."

The weeks which followed were frightful, and we shall not trouble the reader with the painful and monotonous story. Well may any one be astonished that they were able to stand fast, and not go stark mad. They obstinately persisted in this refusal to accept the past—their impure and ineffaceable past—in chasing the specter of a sublime and consecrated affection. More than ever, memories and suspicions poisoned each of their joys, and hideous quarrels crowned their spells of intoxication.

At last, one day George Sand declares that she can go no farther, and is utterly unfit to bring him happiness. "My God!" she continues, "I am reproaching you who are suffering so much yourself. Forgive, my angel, my darling, my unfortunate! I am suffering so myself. . . . You, you want to whip and spur your pain. Haven't you enough as it is? I don't think that there can exist anything worse than what I feel and undergo. Farewell! I would not leave, would not take you back. I love no more—I adore! Stay, go, only say not that I suffer not. That would make me suffer more.

My only love, my life, my heart's core, my blood depart; but, as you depart, slay me." Musset also could go no farther. He had written her that he was packing. As he could not make up his mind to depart, and as the love and wrath storm was furious as ever; as, furthermore, a woman who has been forsaken is inclined to make the first move and get the start, in order not to be deserted a second time—George Sand plotted a sort of jail-breaking for the 7th of March, 1835, and sought refuge at Nohant.

On the 14th she writes to Boucoiran: "My friend, you are wrong in talking to me of Alf. This is no time to say a word against him. Despising is much worse than regretting. Anyhow, neither shall ever overtake me. I cannot regret the stormy life which I am leaving, I cannot despise a man whom, in all that concerns honor, I know so well. I asked you this only, to speak of his health, and the effect my departure has on him. You inform me that he is well, and betrays no mortification—all I desire to learn, and the happiest news I could hear. My desire was to leave, and not cause him suffering. If I have succeeded, God be praised!"

At first the two were relieved, as we may well conceive. George Sand had a liver complaint, and after that crisis she very soon reached the point of indifference. Likewise Musset believed himself cured, but he was mistaken. Something

in him had broken down, leaving an incurable sore.

On neither side—this remark is essential to the appreciation of their characters—on neither side is there any trace, at the earliest rupture, of the abyss of rancor and animosity which the ill-service of their intimates was to dig between them, and at their expense. At long intervals they wrote to each other, for some piece of information, to recommend some person, and they persevered in protecting each other from evil tongues. The *Confession,* in which Musset raises an altar to his friend, came forth in 1836, and George Sand at that time wrote: "For you I do not cease to feel, I confess, all a mother's tenderness, and at the bottom of my heart. Impossible for me to hear any one speak ill of you except with anger." Two years later the *Nuits* came out. Friends did not desist from kindling resentment in them. We feel that hostilities are near. On the 19th of April, 1838, George Sand writes to Musset: "I did not exactly understand the remainder of your letter. I do not understand why you ask whether we are friends or enemies. It seems that you came to see me last winter, and that we had six hours of fraternal intimacy, after which it would never be right to doubt each other, were ten years to come and go without our seeing each other or writing, unless we consented to doubt our own sincerity;

and, in truth, it is beyond me to imagine how and why we should be deceiving each other now." In 1840 they exchange a few letters, to decide what to do with their correspondence. Their last meeting came to pass in 1848.

The conclusion of their story we borrow from George Sand. "Peace and pardon," said she, in her old age, to Sainte-Beuve, one day when they had been stirring the ashes of that terrible past. So be it! Peace and pardon to those wretched victims of romantic love—not at all, as George Sand would have it, because they had loved much, but because they had suffered much.

CHAPTER V

THE NIGHTS

LIFE resumed its wonted course. In a fragment written in 1839, Musset says: "At first I believed that I should not feel regret or pain at my abandonment. I withdrew with pride, but hardly had I looked around me when I beheld a desert. I was attacked with an unexpected suffering. It seemed to me that all my thoughts were falling like dry leaves, when some unknown feeling of dreadful sadness and tenderness rose in my soul. The moment I saw that I could not struggle, I gave way to grief in utter desperation." Little by little his tears dried. "Tranquil now, I cast my eyes on what I have left. With the first book that came under my hand I perceived that all had changed. Nothing of the past continued to exist, or, at least, nothing had the same look. An old picture, a tragedy which I knew by heart, a romance sung an hundred times, a chat with a friend, surprised me; I could not recognize the usual meaning."

Familiar objects round him shocked him. His library—that of a young man—vexed him. "I began, like Cervantes' *curé,* by purging my li-

brary, and putting my idols in the garret. I had in my room a number of lithographs, the best of which seemed hideous. I did not go so far as up-stairs to rid myself of them, and was content with throwing them into the fire. My sacrifice ended, I took count of the remainder. The account was not long, but the few I had kept inspired me with a kind of respect. My library, in its emptiness, distressed me; I purchased another—about three feet wide, and of but three shelves. There I arrayed, slowly and after due reflection, a small number of volumes; as for my frames, they remained unoccupied for a long time. Only at the end of six months did I manage to fill them to my taste; I put in only engravings after Raphael and Michael Angelo."

The engravings were Madonnas, sacred subjects, and a battle piece. The list of the books admitted is interesting: It was Sophocles, Amyot's *Plutarch*, Aristophanes, and Horace; Rabelais, Montaigne, Régnier, the seventeenth-century classics, and André Chénier, Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron, Boccaccio, and the four great Italian poets. Not one writer of the eighteenth century save Chénier; Voltaire or Rousseau no more than Crébillon the younger and Duclos.

That done, he resumed his pen. He had written almost no verse since *Rolla,* published August 15, 1833, at the outset of his liaison with

George Sand, and of which we could not speak farther lest we broke the narrative of the drama. We must then turn back an instant, for *Rolla* cannot be passed over in silence. No other poem has done more to win over the young to Musset. The very faults which could be picked out did him no harm; for example, that declamatory accent in certain passages, since youth is by nature declamatory, and sincerely so. As Sainte-Beuve tells us, law students, medical students had the poem by heart. When it had been printed in the review only, they would declaim it for the benefit of newcomers. And since then the genuine admirers of Musset have always felt a particular tenderness for *Rolla*. Taine speaks of it as "the most passionate of poems," wherein a "bruised heart" has gathered up "all the magnificences of nature and of history, and made a flashing sheaf of them, glistening with the most burning sun of poetry which ever flamed."

From such eloquence, and emotion so strong, we might divine that a moral crisis was at hand, and that passion was in quest of the author of the *Andalusian*. With what suddenness the crisis came, with what unsparing violence passion descended upon him, we have already beheld. He wrote no more for two years—in verse, at all events.

During this protracted silence, poet and man underwent transformation. The man, ripened

by suffering, had almost nothing left of the fair youth who had charmed and bewitched the poets of the Cenacle, nothing of the boyish and radiant appearance of which Sainte-Beuve has preserved the spirited and dazzling memory. "It is twenty-nine years since then," wrote Sainte-Beuve in 1857, on the morrow of Musset's death. "I still see him on his entrance into the literary world, at first into the familiar circle of Victor Hugo, next into that of Alfred de Vigny and of Deschamps. What a début! What easy grace! And, from the first lines he repeated, what surprise and rapture he excited round him! It was spring itself—a whole springtime of poesy bursting forth to our sight. He was not yet eighteen: a lofty, masculine forehead, cheeks in bloom which had not lost the roses of childhood, nostrils swelling with the breath of desire, he came on, with ringing tread and uplifted eye, as one sure of victory and overwhelming with the pride of life. No one, at the first view, could better give the idea of adolescent genius."

To the triumphant youth, so marvelously brought before us by Sainte-Beuve, had succeeded a cold and haughty man, who would know no surrender of himself except with knowledge and reflection. The devoted friend whom he styled his *marraine,* or sponsor, vainly reproached him for his unsociable and disdainful airs. He made acknowledgment with cheerful

alacrity, as he always did, of anything wrong found in him or his works. "Everybody agrees on the disagreeable defects in my bearing in the salon. Not only do I agree with everybody, but the disagreeable is more so to me than to anybody else. Whence comes it? From two first causes: pride and shyness. We can't change nature; we must arbitrate, compromise." He promised his godmother to take it upon himself to cultivate politeness, but he guarded against a surrender of the smallest particle of his heart, whether it were to friendship or to the light and fleeting sympathies, even, which form the ordinary attraction of social intercourse. Was it mere sterility of soul? Was it an apprehension of what it might cost, and intuitive dread of pain? "I looked at myself, querying whether beneath this surly, stiff, and impertinent outside, which excites little affection, whatever the pretty little Milanese may say—whether under it all there were not primitively something passionate and exalted, after the style of Rousseau." That is not doubtful, for there was a little of Saint-Preux in his composition, and without it we should never have had the *Nights,* which assuredly were not written by Mardoche or Octave.

Save two pieces of secondary value; the first verse after his return from Italy was the *May Night*—June 15, 1835, *Revue des Deux Mondes.* The three other *Nights,* the *Letter to Lamartine,*

the *Stanzas to Malibran,* succeeded at brief intervals. In 1838 the *Hope in God* closes the series. The great poet will awake again, but not till three years after, to write his admirable *Souvenir.* By 1838 the best of his novels and the masterworks for the theater were already done. He was then twenty-seven. After the promise of an unrivaled springtime, after the efflorescence of too brief a summer, Alfred de Musset had no autumn, no winter. His entire work is confined to a space of ten years, three or four of which were devoted to reflecting, hesitating, loving, and recovery.

In the poetry of this second period, Musset is no longer a romantic, form only being considered. Not contented with abandoning the conquests of the Cenacle, he turns against his former allies. He is aggressive, waggish; he writes the famous letter of Dupuis and Cotonet on the *Abuse of Adjectives* (*Revue des Deux Mondes,* 1836), in which a pair of plain citizens of Ferté-sous-Jouarre, after trying to comprehend what this romanticism might be, discover it to be a kind of fool-trap, a patchwork of brand-new and second-hand from Shakespeare, Byron, Aristophanes, the Gospels, and the Spaniards—all so adroitly glued and regilt that quidnuncs stand agape before the display without noticing that labels have no sense, and that no man ever knew or will know what in the world social art or hu-

manitarian art may be. Musset even rejects the romantic claim to the invention of the broken line, and he adds, ingrate as he is, "It is, moreover, horrible; and more still, it is impious; it is a sacrilege in the sight of the gods, to the Muses an offense." He leaves them in all and for all, as their "discoveries" and "treasure-trove," the glory of saying *stupéfié* for *stupéfait,* or *blandices* for *flatteries,* and even that with a very bad grace, as if he begrudged it. Had he read Chateaubriand, where the word stands, he would have been prompt to take away *blandices* also.

Victor Hugo and his friends were avenged for *Dupuis et Cotonet,* by Musset. He might unwind himself from the tangle of the formulas used by the younger school, but nevertheless he has romanticism in his marrow. The soul of the newer times was in him, and to drive it out did not depend upon his will, for the movement of 1830 had brought something more weighty and tenacious than a literary form. As Brunetière well expresses it, the most original, peculiar, and distinguishing element in romanticism was a "combination of the liberty and sovereignty of the imagination with the expansion of the poet's personality." Changing the terms, and sticking to things in themselves, romanticism is *lyrisme* —lyrical rapture. The definition looks as if Musset himself had inspired it, so well does it

fit him. He always took pleasure in putting himself, in his own person, into his work.

A taste for this became an imperious necessity after the grand passion. The bard has not a word left, not a thought, either, for anything else than his own affliction. What did all things else signify at present? Not all his genius was too much to tell the terrors of the catastrophe which had rent his life in twain, compelling men to speak of the Musset before Italy and the Musset after George Sand. To the recoil toward classical form corresponds an overflow of romanticism in the sentiment.

The *Night of May* was written in two nights and a day, in the spring of 1835, some weeks after the conclusive break with George Sand. It breathes weariness, deep exhaustion. There is no anger in the poet's answers to the Muse who incites him to sing of springtime, love, glory, happiness or its counterfeits, pleasure or its shadow. We hear the gentle plaint of a sick man, oppressed by his disease, entreating that he be not forced to speak

> Of hope I cannot sing,
> Nor glory nor of bliss,
> Nor yet of suffering.
> The mouth a silent thing
> The heart to hear, I wis.

The Muse is urgent. For want of any better theme, let him sing of his pain:

Despair doth fill the sweetest songs that flow,
Immortal songs that only throb with woe.

The Muse invites him to serve up his own heart at the banquet of the gods, as the pelican parts its vitals, a share to each of its offspring, but he replies, with an exclamation of horror:

O Muse insatiable, spectral form!
Not this from me shalt thou demand.
Man nothing writes upon the sand
That hour when sweeps the rising storm.

The profound causes of his depression appear in the foregoing chapter. He had been making futile attempts to clear away the foul, old stains by means of a passion which was itself a violation of the moral rule, and to his love-sorrows was now added a crushing feeling that he had made a capital mistake on that day when a man chooses the ideal which is to be his reason for existence. After the pattern of the romantic heroes, he had required passion to supply the prop of his moral life, and that prop had broken, and left him bruised and exhausted.

The *Night of May* appeared in the *Revue,* wherein Musset brought out almost everything that had come from his pen since *Namouna.* Six months later came the *Night of December.* The poet has interrupted his course to write the *Confession,* which in the latter two-thirds is a genuine

confession, the sincerity of which moved George Sand to tears. He did not change his subject in writing the second of the *Nights,* whatever Paul de Musset may say about the matter; and here is the place to explain voluntary confusions. He had two reasons for altering the facts: his hatred of George Sand inspiring him to "diminish her share," according to the expression of one who knew him well, and a legitimate wish to bewilder the reader in the medley of fashionable women compromised by his brother. The *Night of December* gave to the heroine a finer share than a justiciary of such harshness could consent to assign to George Sand. We must, however, restore it to her on the faith of testimony which in my eyes is not to be rejected.

The first part of the piece is a mysterious tissue of dreams. The poet seems himself a phantom, which soon dissolves, as he has been left at each stage of his earthly pilgrimage. The vision appears and disappears, like the intermittent dreams of troubled sleep. It is forever the same and forever different; thus does the real man undergo an incessant transformation and renewal.

Suddenly the tone is changed. The poet, in panting phrase, relates the cruel separation, and declares that he was guilty, and that his mistress would not forgive:

Begone, begone, and in that heart of ice
Bear pride content away.
I feel mine young and stout and gay,
And many a woe it may entice,
With what you brought, to stay.

The epilogue of *Solitude* is so awkward, cold, and powerless to interpret anything, that it might well be cut out.

The *Night of December* will receive extraordinary life the day when there shall be printed at the end, as a commentary, two letters of Musset received by George Sand the winter previous —one as to an unjust complaint which he made, and his mad fear lest she refuse to forgive, the other, written in pencil, and in an extreme mental disorder about visions which he has just had of a fantastic world, in which their two specters took strange shapes, and held converse in dream. Musset had recalled all that time in writing the *December Night.* What has been taken as pure fancy, in the marvelous piece, rests upon a basis of reality.

Contemporaries united in recognizing a fresh female influence in the *Letter to Lamartine* of March, 1836, despite the opening of the famous narrative:

As when abandoned by one void of truth
I first knew sorrow in that day of youth.

These two verses and some others seem to indicate that there was some mixture or confusion,

as it were, in Musset's regrets while he was writing the *Letter to Lamartine.* The piece, however, is in a poetic vein which is less even and pure than that of the *Nights. O My Only Love* is a poem which breaks into sobs, but there are merely rhetorical parts in the opening concerning Byron and in the plaudits addressed to Lamartine.

The end is of a lively interest for the biographer. This is the first time that Musset confides to us his opinions as to those fundamental questions whose solution is the great business of the being who thinks. He begins by adopting without examination the God of Lamartine, a simplification which may be too complete:

> The heavens are His and boundless be:
> To One alone belongs immensity.

Thereupon he glorifies the relations of the human soul to the Infinite in strophes of real grandeur. The poet has been rewarded for having this once drawn inspiration from springs eternal and untroubled by the mire of earthly passions:

> Upon thy knees, insensate creature, fall:
> Immortal is the soul, though death seem all.

By adding to this the fragment which sums up the *Hope in God,* "despite of me the Infinite torments me," we have the whole of Musset's religion, Musset cured, according to his own phrase, of the "vile malady of doubt." To tell

the truth, his religion is but a religiosity which exacts little, is not sufficiently incommoding. The nature of it and its limits he himself has traced in a letter to the Duchesse de Castries (1840): "Belief in God is innate in me, dogma and practise are impossible for me; but I would not deny myself anything; certainly, in this respect I am not *mature.*"

The conclusion of the *Letter to Lamartine* was a parenthesis in the occupations of Musset. How soon it was closed, the *Night in August* will attest. Musset has written nothing more impious, in this sense, that he has nowhere exalted the "idolatry of the creature" to so great a height and with so much eloquence, leaving that alone as an horizon for degraded human kind, seeing that alone as the end of "immortal nature." What a hymn to Eros! What a potent evocation of the impassive deity who strides through our blood and laughs at our tears! He grows to an enormous stature as the poet's accents glow ever more and more. He fills the universe with his divinity, and prompts the bard to utter sacrilegious verses.

> I choose to sing of joy and idleness,
> I give my genius for one single kiss:
> Of love I swear to live and die in bliss.

Behold him again among those whom Bossuet mentions, "spending a life in filling the universe

with the mad follies of their youth gone astray." Retribution did not make him wait. The memory of George Sand came back like a master in that devastated heart, and it had never been far away. That he may have had other mistresses is nothing to the point. Certainly it is not the same love as that which he had bestowed upon George Sand, the article which he next handed out, as he might have done with a packet of sweetmeats, to a long procession of the fair and frail, and of grisettes besides.

This turning back toward the past produced the *October Night,* the last and finest of the series, bursting and dying down like a storm brought by the gale and suddenly swept away.

At first a slow movement, giving an impression of serene peace. The poet assures the Muse that his cure is so thorough that it soothes him to tell her of bygone sufferings.

> You shall know all and I will tell to you
> The ill that one, a woman, aye can do.

He begins rather calmly the story of a night spent in waiting for the faithless one. The onset of the tempest is soon heralded by thrilling verses, but the poet still holds himself in check. Suddenly the storm breaks loose:

> Great God! deliver! I behold, 'tis she!

The movement becomes headlong and raging. The efforts of the Muse to appease her foster-child serve only to bring the thunder-crash:

> Shame on thee, thou hast taught me treason,
> Horror and wrath have reft me of my reason!

Maledictions continue to resound for a longer time still, but at last he consents to listen while the Muse talks of pardon, and teaches him to bless the bitter lessons of sorrow. He grows calmer and makes surrender, and forgives with a heart swollen with bitterness:

> Thou from my memory art exiled,
> Thou fragment of a passion wild!

The real forgiveness kept them waiting three years more. In September, 1840, Musset went to visit Berryer at the château in Augerville. He crossed the forest of Fontainebleau in a carriage, in mute contemplation of the phantoms rising before him at every turn of the wheels. Seven years had elapsed since he threaded that forest with George Sand in the young ardor of their passion, and the sight of the places that were witnesses of his happiness poured into his soul a sweet and unexpected consolation.

After coming back to Paris he met her—the one he could never forget—in the corridor of the Italiens. He took his pen, on reaching his home, and he wrote, almost at one burst, the incompara-

ble *Souvenir*—a poem impregnated with a reverence due to the "relics of the heart," and full of the idea that a sentiment is precious according to its sincerity and intensity, independently of the joys or griefs which it may procure. Diderot said: "The first oath sworn by two beings of flesh and blood was at the foot of a rock fallen into dust; they called as witness of their constancy a sky that is never the same; everything in and around them was passing away, and they believed their hearts to be free from vicissitude. O children always!" Musset makes answer:

Mad! says the sage. Happy! the poet cries.

The pieces which we have now reviewed are not to be separated. They form the epilogue to the romantic drama of Venice and of Paris, and they are the original portion of Musset's poetical work, with reservation of the Don Juan, of *Namouna,* and of certain pieces in the earlier collections.

On Musset's earliest manner had lain the yoke of the fashion in rhythm, style, scenery, and choice of subject. In a word, he had received from without some share of his inspiration. In the group of poems dominated by the *Nights,* nothing is conceded to foreign influences. As Sainte-Beuve has said, "the inspiration bursts out from within, whence come also the flame and the breath to color and give fragrance to nature."

The poet is altogether absorbed in himself and in the spectacle of nature, and "his charm consists in the mixture, in the alliance of the two springs of impression—that is, of profound sorrow, and of a soul open still to every living impression. The poet feels spring coming back again, and he feels its intoxicating spell. He grows more sensitive than before to the numberless beauties of nature, to verdure, to flowers, to the rays of the morn, the songs of birds, and he wears his lily and eglantine as fresh as when he was fifteen." Musset, set free and become himself again, has been without parallel in our poetry.

Of the short poems which fill the other two-thirds of the New Poetical Works, not one rises to the same height—far from it. Some, like *Sadness* and *On the Dead,* display emotion. Others, like *Fortunio* or *Ninon,* are tiny masterworks of grace and sentiment. Others, smaller yet and by no means masterpieces, have a certain manner like the eighteenth century. Finally, there are trifles—affected effusions and insignificant nothings—and there is all *Dupont* and *Durant,* so remarkable for the stamp of the verse; we should compare it to the *Plaideurs* and Boileau's realistic verse, in order to grasp thoroughly in what way and measure Musset had classical instincts. In this pell-mell of rimes, very few pieces bring us anything new or essential. We might disre-

gard almost all without guilt of treason committed against the poet.

If, now, we turn back and ask ourselves what rank *The Tales* and the *Spectacle* occupy in the whole of his work, we are not to hesitate to recognize the rank as inferior to that of the *New Poems*. Musset had not yet gained a consciousness of his own character and powers. He was held down by the authority of the romantics, and at heart he was the least romantic of men. It was in vain that in audacity he outstripped all the others; in his bold strokes we feel the artificial. An observant historian of French versification—M. de Souza—speaking of the revival of lyric verse in our century, makes no account of Musset's first works. In his eyes they have no more importance than Gautier's *Albertus:* "They were verses of youthful bravado, so to speak, in which all the exaggerations of the earliest poetic spark grew stronger, and the poets themselves, by their later work, pushed them into the background." This decision is extremely severe and absolute. Souza is interested merely in the technique of the verse, while those early poems have value of another kind. The fresh bloom of genius is a priceless treasure, not to be replaced by anything, and here it shines with splendor. It is a festival for the mind to see this happy youthfulness, with full and prodigal hand, flinging felicitous imagery gaily here

and there, and the inventions of a fresh fancy, wanton and charming ideas, or the kindling sensations of the twentieth year. Let us beware of disdaining this gift, and let us recognize that we must search in the succeeding volume for the real technical methods of Musset which to-day bring down upon him the name of unskilful workman.

There is a point as to which he invited and challenged attack. We should do his shade a wrong to attempt to deny that his rimes are feeble, and worse, at times. He sought to make them poor, striving toward that end, and reaching it. Sainte-Beuve very rightly blamed him for " deriming " his ballad *The Andalusian.* He reproached him, too, with boasting overmuch to the public of the advantage of riming badly: " Musset's verses, with all their wit, have a sort of pretentiousness and fatuity which his talent could do without. There is always a certain reaction against rime and rimers, against lyric poetry and lofty verse, from which, after all, he himself has sprung. It is a slight fault. He is original enough without it. But from the outset he wanted to sport a cockade of his own, and he has turned ours round." Our cockade is the emblem of the school of form, which Musset was always afraid that he had not turned quite upside down. He would have been chagrined had he been able to read the page on which M. Faguet, after commending the poor rimes, makes haste

to add: "Well, let us own that we do not think of them when we are reading." Poor Musset might have spared the pains he took to rime *griser* and *levrier!*

Furthermore, he is reproached with classical rhythms, regular cæsuras, repeated negligence, and easy ways of contenting himself. In other words, certain people reproach him with being neither a precursor nor a faultless poet, and each reproach is well grounded. It would, at least, be justice not to fail to appreciate this: that he has made the most of the technical resources to which he confined himself.

It is incontestable that after the *Tales* he profited hardly at all, by new romantic formulas, to vary his alexandrines. Musset, in his second manner calling himself *réformé,* and by Sainte-Beuve called *relâché,* admits the double cæsura sometimes, but this kind of pause has little importance. He has recourse to more delicate rhythmic elements to shade and modulate his verse. He is the master in distributing in the body of a line accentuated syllables of words, or words receiving the oratorical stress. He was ignorant of none of the infinitely varied effects produced by interlacing mute and resonant syllables—the obscure and the full. He discerned how precious the mute syllable is—a treasure of the French language of poetry—and how useful in prolonging a preceding syllable.

Instinct revealed the mysterious relations existing between the sonority of the word and the image to be evoked—a power independent of the value of the idea expressed, a power which the broad movement of the alexandrine most highly favors. Finally, the just or false scruples, preventing Musset from disjointing his alexandrines, were not in the way of a mingling of meters, and by means of this he produced the most happy effects, particularly in the *Nights*.

Most technical processes can be imitated and transmitted. Théodore de Banville, in his treatise on versification, gives recipes by means of which any imbecile may, we are assured, turn out very fine verses. But the choice of words, the unexpected value, the particular resonance which they receive under the poet's pen—all that is not to be imitated, not to be taught, for those are not things controlled by the poet's will; they are determined beforehand by the inmost nature of the poetic vision. Thus, in the case of Gautier, the epithet is almost always purely material, and it expresses no more than color and form; and often it is the same with Hugo. But in his case the epithet is symbolic, and interprets much less the real aspect of things than the ideas called forth in ourselves, the impressions, and unwonted and remoter images. Musset's epithet paints at once the outward appearance of the object, and its poetic meaning. There exists seemingly a

necessary accord between the essence of things and their sensible form. This may be an error in metaphysics, but what would become of poetry without the illusion? We may judge its worth by verses in which Musset has revealed with grandeur, by means of two adjectives, the splendor of the summer night, and the emotion it awakes in the depths of the soul:

> Voluptuous mildness of melancholy nights
> Springs from the calyx of the flowers around.

In the following the epithets make us see the adorable little virgin, and open her innocent soul before us:

> A maiden in fine gold from tomes of legend quaint,
> In floods of velvet dragging tiny feet.

Those who like the curious subject of rare sensation will perhaps be interested in learning that Musset possessed color-hearing, which in his day was never discussed, and which so much occupies the attention of contemporary psychologists. In an unpublished letter to Madame Jaubert, he declares himself to have been wroth, when dining with his family, at being compelled to make an argument in order to prove that *fa* was yellow, *sol* red, a soprano voice fair, and the contralto dark. He supposed that such things were self-evident.

As we mount toward the spring of Musset's inspiration we find it not hidden; and, to discover that source, we have no need that he should make his Muse say:

> Which is the poet, thou or but thy heart?
> My heart is poet!

A tender sensibility, and one that was formidable, brought to him the consecrated flame. To it he owed a sincerity which he could not have restrained, even had he wished, and a passionate eloquence, able to pity sufferings other than his own. We may recall the *Hope in God:*

> Thy pity surely was profound
> When, with its bliss and many a pang,
> This wondrous and this wretched earth
> With wailing from dark chaos sprang!

But the price he paid was dreadful. Because he felt with a painful violence, he referred everything to sensation, and fixed pleasure as the object of life. Whensoever a soul, noble and pure of vulgarity and baseness, has fallen into this error, it has sunk into an incurable melancholy, if not absolute despair. Musset escaped not this fatality. With a cheerful wit he had a heart that bled, a heart that was disconsolate, a union less seldom seen than is commonly thought. His

poems make a divinity of sensation, but from the first he had felt the bitter relish of pleasure:

Surgit amari aliquid medio de fonte leporum.

For this reason the reading of his poetry leaves in us a saddened feeling. The bitter relish dominates all the others.

CHAPTER VI

PROSE WORKS—PLAYS

MUSSET's début as a playwright was a conspicuous failure. After the noise made by his earlier poems, the Odeon asked him for a play, "the newest and boldest possible." He wrote the trifle called the *Venetian Night,* which, in times of literary peace, would have passed unperceived, and which fell before a storm of hisses on the 1st of December, 1830. This rebuff had the happiest consequences.

The author, in his resentment, declared that he would write no more for theaters. Hence he felt himself untrammeled by any anxiety to obey the fashion which gives plays a transient and factitious showiness, for which they must pay in wrinkles of premature old age. He now had only to attend to the higher and immutable elements of art, the soul and its passions, the laws of life and their fateful action. Neglecting the ever-changing conventions of the theater, disdaining unsettled formulas, the offspring of the hour and of caprice, he wrote the least perishable works of the nineteenth century. Since he renounced the task of writing for his own time, Musset wrote for all time.

We are not to imagine that his dramatic productions would have been almost the same, had he hoped to see them performed. It is not doubtful that if he had continued to write for the stage after he had broken with the Cenacle, his works would have passed through the same evolution as his poetry, in the same classical direction. Musset, dehugotized, had his eyes opened wide to the defects of the romantic drama. While he believed in its vitality, he thought that there was room beside it for a severer form of art: "Would it not be a fine thing to essay, in our days, the real tragedy, not that of Racine, but that of Sophocles, in all its simplicity, with strict observance of rules?" "Would it not be a bold enterprise, but a praiseworthy one, to purge the stage of those empty speeches, philosophical madrigals, and displays of twaddle which burden the boards at the present time?"

"Would it not be a great novelty to awake the Greek muse, venturing to show her to the French in her grandeur and sublime atrocity?

"Would it not be curious to see her in the encounter with the modern drama, which often considers itself terrible when it is only ridiculous; to see her as she was, wild, inexorable, in the bright days of Athens, when the bronze urns quivered at the sound of her voice?"

This was not mere idle talk. Musset labored for the drama once after the failure of 1830.

Rachel had requested a play, and he, without wavering, undertook a classical tragedy, thinking at first of the *Alcestis* of Euripides. This project having been put off till a later date, he came down to a Merovingian subject. A falling out with Rachel interrupted *The Servant to the King* (1839). Some scenes, however, survive, and they do not cause a very lively regret for the loss of the others; they promised to be part of a tragedy of distinction, and it is matter of slight importance for French literature that we possess one distinguished tragedy more or less, while it is highly important that we have *Lorenzaccio* and *No Trifling with Love.*

Musset, we must add, was of the number of the warm admirers of Ponsard's *Lucrece.* He wrote to his brother in 1833: "M. Ponsard, a young writer who comes from the country, has brought out at the Odeon a tragedy, very fine despite poor acting. He is the lion of the day. The talk is all of him, and justly so."

Blessed, then, be the hisses which received the *Venetian Night* so roughly! Musset, no longer troubling himself henceforth about being fit for the stage, took no further pains to seize his dreams on the fly, and to fix them, such as they were, on paper. To this emancipation from every rule we owe an historical dream, which is the only Shakespearian play in our language and of our theater, and half a dozen of adorable

dreams concerning love, in which, as Gautier says, " melancholy is chatting with cheerfulness."

The idea of *Lorenzaccio* germinated in Musset's mind during the swift hours spent in Florence with George Sand, at the very end of 1833. The noble city still wore the frowning girdle of crenelated walls with which the republicans of the fourteenth century had surrounded it, and which was demolished in our day to widen the ephemeral capital of the young kingdom of Italy. Florence had preserved in all its grim severity, that dark and hard look which contrasts so strangely with the pure and winding lines of its smiling hills, and which makes it the most astounding example of how far the genius of man can break free from the tyranny of nature. The common people's quarters, not yet thrown open to the light of day by broad avenues, entangled their narrow and tortuous streets, favorable to riot and ambuscade about the fortress-palaces of the Strozzi and the Riccardi. The entire city, to the mind of him who could understand the tale told by the stones, illustrated and commented upon the ancient chronicles of the Florentines. Musset, profiting by the lesson, found, as he turned the leaves of those chronicles, the subject of his drama: the murder of Alexander de Medici, tyrant of Florence, perpetrated by his cousin Lorenzo, and the uselessness of the murder for liberating the city. A little idle saun-

tering about the town furnished him with the frame and setting. A peculiar mixture of historical intuitions and personal souvenirs effected the rest. Paul de Musset says, in *Lui et Elle,* that the piece was written in Italy. Then it must have been in Venice, in January, 1834, during the three or four months elapsed between the coming of Alfred and his sickness.

The action of *Lorenzaccio* puts under our eyes a revolutionary fiasco, with all its train of intrigue and violence, in the splendid and rotten Italy of the sixteenth century. Through these agitations, which are depicted in warm colors, a gloomy tragedy unfolds in a bewildered and desperate heart, which it fills with a shuddering, despondent grief. Once more we have the history of the irreparable degradation of man broken with debauchery.

O'er it the sea might roll nor wash away the stain.

Lorenzaccio de Medici is an idealist and an Utopian, a republican of 1830. He believes in virtue, in progress, in human greatness, in the magic potency of words. He was twenty when he saw the demon, the tempter of dreamers of his kind: "A demon fairer than Gabriel: liberty, our country, human happiness, all those words resound at his coming like the chords of a lyre, the noise of the silver scales of his flashing wings. Tears fall from his eyes, and make earth teem,

and in his grasp he holds the martyr's palm. His words purify the air round his lips; his flight is so swift that none can say whither his course. Beware! Once in my life I have seen him career athwart the sky. As I bent over my books, the touch of his fingers made my hair to quiver like the feathers of a bird." Ever since this radiant apparition swiftly darted through the study in which Lorenzo was pursuing in peace art and science, the student has been giving up his sluggard repose. He has sworn to slay tyrants in pure love of mankind, and in some degree also from pride. He has begun to live with this idea: "I must be a Brutus."

The ruler of downtrodden Florence is a cruel debauchee, Alexander de Medici. Lorenzo counterfeits the same vices to gain his confidence, to creep up to his side, and to assassinate him. He debases himself even to becoming the master of his shameful pleasures, the accomplice in his crimes, an object of reproach, of infamy, of whom his mother can never think without weeping, and whom the common folk call Lorenzaccio in their contempt. But finally the hour for casting the mask away has struck. The Duke shall perish, Florence be free. The new Brutus, when about to deal the blow, perceives with consternation that no man can pollute his soul with impunity. That is an unforgiven crime for which no atonement can be, which pursues the guilty

man even to the tomb. Lorenzo has put on a mask, a disguise to throw off at will, but debauch has mastered him and gangrened him to the vitals, and there will be no escape: "I have broken myself in to this trade. Vice was a garment; now it is glued to my skin. Truly a ruffian am I, and whenever I jest about my fellow I feel as sad as death amid my merriment."

With virtue lost, he has lost faith. His sojourn in the great confraternity of vice has made him despise men, one not even believing in the cause for which he has given more than life. He is about to free his country, offer the republicans a chance to bring freedom back, and he knows that their selfish indifference will not profit by it all; that the people, freed from Alexander's yoke, will throw themselves into the arms of some other tyrant. Yet will he slay the Duke, because the design of this murder is the last fragment of that time when he was pure as the lily, and that blood, the tyrant's blood, will wash away his dishonor.

Philippe: "Why wilt thou slay him, if thou hast such thoughts?"

Lorenzo: "Why? Canst thou ask that?"

Philippe: "If thou dost think the murder useless to thy country, why do it?"

Lorenzo: "And that thou askest to my face? Look at me, pray. I was fair of face and calm and pure."

Philippe: "O the abyss thou openest to me!"

Lorenzo: "And dost thou ask why I slay Alexander? Shall I drink poison, leap into Arno? Shall I become a specter, and if I smite a skeleton shall no sound come? If I am the shadow of myself, shall I snap that sole thread that ties my heart to-day to some fibers of my heart of yore? Canst thou imagine that this assassination is all the virtue left me; that for these two years I have been slipping down a precipice, and that the murder is the one blade of grass my nails can clutch? Have I no pride, because I have no shame? Shall I permit my life's enigma to expire unspoken? Yea, could I return, could my apprenticeship to vice fade away, I peradventure could spare that drover. But I love wine and gaming, women also. Understand? If thou honor aught in me, it is the murder, perchance because thou wouldst not do it. They are covering me with mire, these democrats; my ears ring with infamous jibes; men's execration poisons the bread I chew; it is enough to be spit upon by nameless wretches who shower insults on me to be dispensed from butchering me, as they ought. Enough of hearing human gabblers bawling to the winds: the world must learn whereof I am and what he is. God be thanked, perhaps to-morrow I will kill Alexander."

The murder done, he tastes a few moments of unspeakable happiness.

Lorenzo: "How beautiful this night! How pure the sky! Breathe, heart of mine o'ercome with joy!"

Scoronconcolo: "Come, master; we must begone."

Lorenzo: "How sweet and balmy is the evening breeze! and in the meadows how the flowers unfold! Nature magnificent! Repose eternal!"

Lorenzo: "Ah, God of goodness! What a moment!"

This is the hosanna of the creature set free from ill. Short illusion, brief joy! While Florence surrenders to another Medici, Lorenzo feels that vice never will let him loose, and he goes to offer himself to the daggers of the hired assassins who pursue.

In the *Cup* we saw a sketch of this dramatic personage, but the causes of Frank's wretchedness lurked under a veil in part, while in this case the warning is as clear as it is painful. Musset, in a rash and libertine youth, has gone downward on the edge of that abyss into which Lorenzo has slipped, and he insists that he must tell his contemporaries that to climb up again is impossible.

In this drama there are two other personages for which he had but to appeal to souvenirs, memories which were less his own. His goldsmith and his silk-dealer are Paris shopkeepers at the time of Louis Philippe. The goldsmith

was doubtless a subscriber to the *National,* and had Armand Carrel's portrait in the back shop. The silk-dealer is a monarchist—he takes the inventory of stock, and knows that courts make trade good. One criticizes everything that the court does and holds it to account when customers don't pay, the other rubs his hands when there is a ball at the Tuileries.

The Merchant: "I declare such *fêtes* delight me, they do. You're in bed, quiet and still, with a corner of the curtain drawn back; you watch the lights now and then as they come and go in the palace; you catch a bit of dance-music without paying for it, and you say, that's my stuff dancing, my fine silks, the good Lord's own, on the dear bodies of those fine and loyal gentlemen."

The goldsmith also opens shop: "More than one dances and gets no pay, neighbor; the ones they soak with wine, and then rub up against the walls with the least respect."

The discussion goes on as they take their shutters down. "The Lord preserve his Highness!" concludes the shopkeeper as he goes in again. "The court is a fine thing."

"The court! The people carry it on their backs, don't you see?" is the goldsmith's retort from the threshold of his shop.

These good people had never in their lives seen the Arno nor the Ponte Vecchio. They lived in

the Rue de Bac at the corner of the quay, and they supplied their wares to our grandmothers.

The remainder of Musset's dramatic work has love for its almost exclusive subject, but it is infinitely diversified. The love of the young girl, of women, of coquettes, of the Christian wife, love in Alfred de Musset at different ages and in all his moods: the frank stripling or the man already *blasé,* gay or melancholy, ironical or passionate. For he has put himself into all his swains in his unwearied desire to tell us his thought as to that thing which he esteemed most divine in this world. "The ideas of Musset as to love," said Jules Lemaître, "reach far back, across the ages, to those of the primitive poets. Love is the first-born of the gods, the force moving the universe." It is not, as Valentine declares to Cecile, the eternal thought which makes the spheres to gravitate, but the love eternal. These worlds live because they seek one another, and the suns would fall into dust if one of them ceased to love. "Ah!" exclaims Cecile, "all of life is there. Yes, all life." Love so understood is lifted to the rank of a holy mystery. Pagan, if you will, but grand and poetic.

The *Chandler* ought to come first in a life of Musset, though not written till 1835. This play brings him forward at the hour of charm and danger at which the collegian was grown to man's estate and was awaking as a poet. The

adventure of Fortunio, minus the dénouement, happened to him in 1828, during the summer spent at Auteuil. Jacqueline lived in the environs of Paris. For sake of the happiness of gazing at her, playing with her fan, or bringing a pillow for her, Musset would cross Saint-Denis plain unceasingly, and in those days there was no railway nor tramway. But he was seventeen, the heroic age of love, and he was romantic also.

He gave Fortunio his face and shape. "A little blond fellow," says Jacqueline's servant. "That's it," answers her mistress, "I see him now. He has not a bad face, with his fair locks over his ears and his little innocent look. He is running after grisettes, this gentleman with the blue eyes?"

We may believe that at that age he had also the timid but passionate heart of his hero; that, like him, he was more or less an angel of candor and a little monster of effrontery; and if the part breathes a delicate fragrance of poetry, that does not impair the resemblance. Be that as it may, the personage is very winning—a cherub full of emotion, and touched with melancholy. How different he is from Beaumarchais' little scamp who, with his smart ways, runs after any petticoat. What a contrast to our cherubs of the end of the nineteenth century, with their sterile, calculating souls! The declaration of Fortunio,

third clerk to the notary, to his fair mistress has not grown obsolete in form, as it is irreproachably simple. The declaration, in its essence, belongs to a departed race of adolescents whose hearts are young, who fear not to let the tears tremble on their eyelids. The rhetoricians of our day would make merry at its simple eloquence; they are better trained in arguments to touch the heart of some corrupt little *bourgeoise.*

Jacqueline: " That was a pretty song you sang just now at table. Whom was it made for? Would you let me have it, all copied out? "

Fortunio: " It's written for you; I am dying of love, and my life belongs to you."

Jacqueline: " Indeed! I thought that the refrain forbade you to tell her name? "

Fortunio: " Ah! Jacqueline, have pity on me; this is not the first day I suffer. For two years I have followed the print of your feet through the hornbeams. For two years, without your knowing of my existence, you never went out or in, your light and trembling shadow never appeared behind your curtains, you never opened your window, you never stirred out of doors without my being there and seeing you. I could not come near, but, thank God! your beauty belonged to me as the sun to every one; I sought, I breathed it, I lived on the shadow of your life. You spent the morning on the threshold of the door, and every night I came back and shed tears

there. If any words, fallen from your lips, made their way to me, I repeated them every day. You cultivated flowers, and my room was filled with them. In the evening you sang at the piano, and I knew, word for word, all your romances. Whatever you loved, I, too, loved, and I intoxicated myself with all that passed through your lips or within your heart. Alas! I see you smile. God knows my suffering is real, and that I am dying of love for you."

The Jacqueline of history was insensible to this sweet eloquence, as also to the reproaches wherewith Fortunio overwhelmed her when he discovered that he had served as a screen for Captain Clavaroche. She did not repent of the crime against love when she deluded the green, confiding heart in which her perverse skill had caused passion to burst forth, when she dropped into it the serpent poison of suspicion of which he was never cured, when she played " with all that is most sacred under heaven like a cheat playing with loaded dice." The harm which she herself had done made her smile.

Follies of Marianne appeared on the 15th of May, 1833. In this play Musset put a share of himself into his personages: Octave, the precocious libertine with a brilliant exterior hiding a whited sepulcher wherein sleeps the dust of youth's generous illusions, is Musset, his wicked ego inspired with sensuality and blasphemy, the

slayer of his genius. "I cannot love," says Octave. "I am but a heartless debauchee; I do not respect women; what love I may inspire is like the love I feel, the passing intoxication of a dream. My merry mood is but the mask of the actor; my heart is older than my cheery spirits; my senses are blunted, too surfeited for more."

Cœlio the lover is Musset again, the Musset of his better moments—bashful and sensitive, and somewhat saddened by Octave and his immorality, so that he uselessly expostulates with him. How marked this duality was in Musset has been pointed out already: "All who knew Alfred know how he resembled at once Octavio and Cœlio, although these two figures seem at the antipodes to each other." Strangers themselves knew it. On one of the first occasions when George Sand saw Musset, she told him how people asked her whether he was Octave or Cœlio, and said that she had answered "both, I should think." Some days later he wrote her a letter to recall the anecdote, to accuse himself of showing only the Octave, and to beg leave to make Cœlio speak. And this was his declaration, the beginning of their romance. He also said of himself, knowing well his want of equilibrium, "I weep or I burst into laughter."

This sort of doubling caused inward dialogues whereof we have an authentic sample. The con-

versation of Uncle Van Buck with his good-for-nothing nephew, at the opening of *Prudence Spurns a Wager,* is historic. This is a talk which Musset had with himself one morning in his bedroom, after some foolish conduct. His better ego had wrapped him in his gown, the symbol of virtue, had seated him in a respectable family armchair, and had given the other ego a very tart scolding, and the latter answered with Valentine's impertinences. Some days after the dialogue was written, and the whole piece came springing from it. The following, from the first scene of the *Follies of Marianne,* has the appearance of having occurred in the same room before a mirror, after the return from a *bal masqué.*

Cœlio: "What masquerade is this? Isn't that Octave?"

Octave: "My good sir, how is that graceful melancholy doing?"

Cœlio: "Octave! You are crazy, with a foot of rouge on your cheeks! Where did you get that accouterment? Not ashamed, and in broad daylight?"

Octave: "O Cœlio! You are mad, with a foot of white on your cheeks! Where did you find that broad black coat? Not ashamed, and in mid-carnival?"

Cœlio: "What a life! Either you are tipsy, or I am not myself."

Octave: "Either you are in love, or I am myself."

Moral of the sermon: Octave will undertake to introduce his friend to the fair Marianne.

To complete the resemblance between his two heroes and his own two egos, Musset condemned the debauchee to become the involuntary executioner of the nobler personage. The Cœlio of real life was continually assassinated by Octave, who also breathed out his remorse in poetical lamentations, as he does in the piece. "I alone in the world have known him. For me only that silent existence was no mystery. The long evenings we spent together are like fresh green in the dust; they shed upon my heart the only drops of dew which have fallen there. Cœlio was the better part of me; it has gone up to heaven with him. . . . This tomb is mine; I am lying beneath this cold stone. For me they sharpened their swords, and me they killed." Having said so much on the ill he was doing himself, Musset picked up his hat and went back to uproarious dinners and long suppers in the forest shade. Cœlio came back to life only to be killed anew, and each time his life was a little more frail.

As for the subject of the piece, it is contained in one of the epigrams in *Namouna:* "A woman is like your shadow: run after her, she will flee; fly from her, she will run after you."

Again, *Fantasio* is concerned with a crime

against love. Written before the Italian journey, this work was published on January 1, 1834. Princess Elsbeth, daughter of a king of Bavaria, a Bavaria situated in the blue realm of fancy, has through mere policy consented to wed the Prince of Mantua, and she weeps when alone because her fiancé is an imbecile whom she could not possibly love. She is not ignorant that it is the lot of kings' daughters to marry the first comer according to the exigencies of politics, but it all costs her suffering through her romanesque governess's fault, for the latter has been teaching her homely sentiments. Elsbeth gently reproaches her: " Why did you let me read so many stories and fairy-tales? Why did you sow in my poor thoughts so many strange and mysterious flowers? " The harm is now beyond relief. In contempt of policy and etiquette her young heart swells with love-germs all ready to unfold, and these must be blighted when she becomes the wife of a horrible idiot. Elsbeth is all resignation in order to spare the two kingdoms a war. A sacrifice, inspired by the Christian idea that love ought to be immolated to higher duties, appears a monstrous sacrifice to Musset, who, disguised as Fantasio, goes to tell the young Princess so, and this new incarnation is not one of the weakest in point of resemblance.

He was Fantasio—always by fits and freaks —toward his twentieth year. His talk was at

that day rich in the unforeseen, as in the dialogue with the plain, respectable Spark. His conduct upset all prevision, his own included. His humor was to go on by jumps and somersaults, according as he was passing through this or that mental state defined by Lemaître with enlightening sagacity. "Fantasio is a Bohemian, and Musset has lent him his soul. Fantasio is uneasy because he knows too much of love. He believes himself in despair, he sees how ugly and useless the world is—because he is no longer a lover. Like Musset, he has the love of love, and after each experiment an unconquerable disgust, and after that an invincible need of making the experiment again, and in ever-recurring surfeit a desire that always revives; in short, the great human malady, the only malady: impatience at being but ourselves, impatience that the world is only what it is, and imperishable illusion rising endlessly from imperishable despair." Fantasio in the comedy piously undertakes to break off a match that would be an offense against the divine Eros. He rigs himself out in the hump and periwig of the court clown, buried the night before, and gets into the palace.

Read the rest who will, for it is not to be analyzed. It is a pleasant dream, all in dialogue, and we must allow it to lull us without exacting too much logic or fearing to let imagination wander. The initiated would like to ferret out symbolic

meanings in the play. The first meeting of the Princess and Fantasio may be recalled:

Elsbeth: "There must be some one behind those bushes. Is it the ghost of my poor clown that I can see among those blue flowers, sitting in the grass? Answer me. Who are you? What are you doing there, picking those flowers?"

Fantasio: "I am an honest flower-gatherer, and I wish your bright eyes good day."

George Sand alludes to this in one of her glowing letters sent to Musset during a quarrel; we have already cited some fragments from it. Here is something hitherto unpublished, written after coming home from the Italiens at midnight. She had been there unattended. "Here am I, in my sailor hat, alone, distressed at coming in among these black-faced men. And look at me; I am in mourning, hair cut short, eyes ringed, cheeks hollow, looking stupid, old. And up there are all those blonde, white, dressed-up ladies, rose-colored feathers, big curls, bouquets, and bare shoulders. And where am I? Lo! up there, over me, the field where Fantasio is gathering his blue flowers!"

The dénouement of Fantasio is all smiles. Eros is victorious: sweet Elsbeth will not marry her booby of a suitor. It is true that two peoples will cut each other's throats; but the death of some thousand men never was an important mat-

ter in a fairy-tale, where they can be brought to life again with a touch of the wand, any more than purses of gold thrown by fair princesses to their needy subjects, any more than anything that may be shocking if we have the ill luck to see the piece on the stage. Pasteboard trees and an electric sun are much too real for Fantasio.

No Trifling with Love is perhaps Musset's dramatic masterpiece. The piece is of narrower scope and less power than *Lorenzaccio*, but it is perfect. Written after coming home from Italy, it proclaims the masculine resignation of the *Souvenir*, to the woes which love brings in its train:

O nature! O my mother! And yet have I less loved?

"I would love, but would not suffer," says Camille, tutored at a convent in every kind of downy, namby-pamby precaution. "Poor child," answers Perdican, "you talk of some sister who appears to have had a destructive influence on you; she has been deceived, has deceived herself, and is desponding. Are you sure that were her husband or her lover to stretch out his hand through the grating in the parlor, she would not stretch out hers?"

Camille: "What? I did not hear."

Perdican: "Are you sure that were her husband or her lover to come and tell her to suffer again, she would say no?"

Camille: "I think so."

By the time she says this she no longer believes it, and Perdican's farewell pierces her heart like a sharpened arrow.

"Farewell, Camille! Back to the convent, and when you hear those hideous tales which have poisoned you, answer what I say: All men are liars, fickle, false, tattlers, hypocritical, proud and base, contemptible and sensual; all women are perfidious, tricky, vain, inquisitive, and depraved . . . but there is one holy and sublime thing in the world—the union of two of these beings, imperfect and frightful as they are. In love we are often deceived, often wounded, and often unhappy, but we love; and when we are at the brink of the grave we turn to look back, and we say: Often have we suffered, sometimes been deceived, but we have loved."

He goes forth to defy rashly the vindictive divinity who allows none to trifle with love. Perdican's cruel trifling with a poor peasant girl causes two to be victims: the guileless Rosette, who being deceived dies, and the proud Camille, who is to waste away beneath her veil with sorrowing over a happiness of which she has had but a glimpse. Love has taken vengeance on two foolish beings who have not been truthful to him.

It was Musset's last drama. A beam of cheer-

fulness came and rested upon him, and *Barberine* shows us how an intelligent woman makes those beardless simpletons repent who openly profess to disbelieve in woman's virtue, just to make us believe that they have always been irresistible. Noiselessly, quietly, Barberine gives young Rosemberg a lesson which he will always bear in mind, and perhaps with no great bitterness. He is so much a child that he is just the one to find amusement in earning his supper at the spinning-wheel. "He is a young man of good family," she writes to her husband, "and not vicious. All he needed was to learn to spin, and I have taught him. Should you see his father at court, tell him to have no anxiety about him. He is in the top tower-room, where there is a good bed, a good fire, and a spinning-wheel and distaff, and he is spinning. You will think it extraordinary that I choose this for him, but as I noticed that he needed only a power of reflecting, I thought it was for the best to teach this trade, which allows him to reflect at leisure while it makes him earn a living. You know that of yore our tower was a prison; I lured him to it by telling him to await me there, and then I locked him in. The wicket in the wall is very convenient; they hand him his food through it, and he is doing well, for he has the healthiest look in the world, and one can see him get fat."

Rosemberg is so free from spite that he is

growing stout! A good little fellow, and he will not try it again.

We have spoken of the *Chandler* and told the origin of *Prudence Spurns a Wager,* in which Cecile is near akin to Barberine. She also undertakes, young as she is, to correct the young coxcombs who fancy they know women because of successes achieved in the side scenes or at international charity bazaars. The punishment is very mild this time. Valentine has played very badly a mean part; he was a fool, and it is no fault of his that he did not become odious. Nevertheless, his faults are forgiven, and at the dénouement he weds Cecile. The chaste love of a young woman has been a shield to this *mauvais sujet,* preserving him from punishment. If some straight-laced reader, deeming him undeserving of indulgence, blames his unmerited good fortune, she does not see one of the fairest privileges of her sex, that of purifying by honest affection hearts tainted by easy pleasures, and forcing their portals for the incoming of respect and duty. Few pages have been written as glorious for woman as the scene of the meeting in the forest, at the end of which the conquered libertine returns thanks to innocence, in a wild burst of joy and gratitude, for having comprehended nothing that he has said.

Valentine: "Not afraid? Did you come here, and never trembled?"

Cecile: "Why? What should I fear? You, or the night?"

Valentine: "Why not me? Who gives you confidence? I am young, you are beautiful, and we are alone."

Cecile: "Well! What harm in that?"

Valentine: "I know; there is nothing wrong, but listen, and let me fall down on my knees."

Cecile: "What ails you now? You are shivering."

Valentine: "It is fear, it is joy."

Valentine, having just made discovery of purity, worships it upon his knees. He is saved, but it is a narrow escape.

Musset afterward wrote two more little proverbs, and they are full of wit: in 1837 *A Caprice,* and in 1845 *The Door Must be Either Open or Shut.* The graceful *Carmosine* was written in 1850. Among a number of tiny, tame pieces, the last, *The Donkey and the Stream,* of 1855, has a right to be named, because of one pretty little part, that of the ingénue. Her name is Marguerite, and but yesterday she was playing with her doll. With nose perked up and eye alert, she has brought home from the convent her theories as to marriage and how to make the men step, which she applies with energy, at the risk of tears, when the lover pretends to take her outbursts too seriously. Her lively profile forms a dainty close to a procession of young ladies

which has no pendant in our dramatic literature. Musset had not lost a moment when he spent nights waltzing—not always in time, as one of his partners assures me—and chattering with his dancing-mate. In discussing the cut of a dress or the rules of a cotillion figure, he had been fathoming that being, as close and enigmatical as a flower-bud, the young girl. Cecile, Elsbeth, Carmosine, and that little Marguerite, though there is hardly a glimpse of her, will be his witnesses before posterity when men accuse him of having found his delight in audacious pictures of sensual inspiration. Their charming shadows will attest that his imagination was not without its people of virginal figures, and the ulcer of contempt never was secretly gnawing his soul at the sight of young maidens, whether peasants or noble ladies.

Elsbeth perceives that she is romanesque, reproaches herself, and at the same time feels a certain thankfulness to herself for the defect. Family interest demands her marriage to an absurd blockhead. Too good and too straightforward to allow her dreams to come between her and her duty, she tastes a secret pleasure in feeling that duty causes her a pang, and that she is not one of those positive and cold young women whose dreams are cheerful and not ironical like hers, when about to take a lout as husband. I shall be a lady after all, which may

amuse me; I shall take a fancy to my dresses, and so on—to my teams and my new livery: "Happy it is that in marrying there is something else than a husband. It may be that I shall find happiness hidden among my wedding-presents." She has a solid fund of sound sense and clear judgment, but she has had an opportunity to read a number of English novels, and in her small acquaintance with the world has been confused by their decent romanesque sentimentality.

Cecile has no liking for novels, none for romanticism in action. She, at a glance, saw that Valentine, with all his pretentions to clear-headedness and to experience, takes for reality what is only literature, and her reproaches are very nice: "What do you mean by jumping into a pit? Risking your life, and for what? You contrived to be received by us, and your wishing to succeed without help I understand; but the rest, of what use is that? Do you like novels?"

Valentine: "Sometimes . . ."

Cecile: "I own that novels do not please me particularly. Those I have read amount to nothing but lies, I think, everything invented on purpose. They are always talking about nothing but seductions, tricks, intrigues, and a thousand impossible things."

She is not the one to play the misunderstood woman, the plague of romanticism, whom we have not yet shaken off, and who, in disguise

after disguise, has not ended her appearances. Cecile, according to her promise, will give her husband good bouillon, and will love him with all her honest little heart, because he is her husband, and without insisting that he be genius or hero. She is altogether his superior. Valentine is giddy and fast. Cecile will be his reason and his conscience. Call to mind her talk with the dancing-master: "Mademoiselle, with all I say, you do not make the right movement. Now turn your head slightly, and round your arms." Cecile: "But, sir, if you do not want to fall, you must certainly look straight ahead." She will look ahead for two, this modest and exquisite creature, and her husband will reward her with esteem and confidence.

Camille has heard more of the evils of life; she is less guileless than Cecile. Musset designed to bring out the difference between a girl reared at home and one brought up in a convent. The former, in holy ignorance of danger, hastens to the rendezvous appointed in the woods at night by a man whom she has known but a day, and who she thinks is her fiancé. The other answers her playmate, who tries to clasp her hand, in the phrase invented in the convent, which Cecile would not comprehend: "I do not like to be touched." Poor Camille! Just eighteen, she has never read an improper book. Yet there is neither confidence nor joy in life within her

youthful heart, touched with a blight through the confidences of those who, after shipwreck in the world, find in convents a shelter against it and themselves. "Do they know," asks Perdican, in consternation at her precocious disenchantment, "do they know that they are committing a crime when they come and whisper in the ear of a maiden the words of a matured woman? Ah! What a lesson for them to give you!" Camille, as she listens to these bitter stories, sees humanity through a horrid dream; and she prays God to have nothing of the woman left in her.

As she leaves the shadows of the cloister, her nightmare is dissolved. "You were going away without taking my hand," says her cousin; "you wished never to see again either that wood or that poor little fountain which is watching us all in tears; you denied the years of childhood, and that plaster mask which the nuns fixed on your cheeks refused to me a brotherly kiss; but your heart beat, it forgot its lesson through not knowing how to read, and you have come again and sat down on the grass where we are." Camille is in love, and her dazzled eyes reopen to the truth. Now she believes in love, life, happiness, and in Perdican. With joy she welcomes suffering. Her pride melted and she became a weak woman again, when their imprudence separated her from Perdican. Poor Camille!

The other young girls in Musset's plays have

the same family air as the chorus *coryphées.* All these chaste heroines have two features in common. They are true to their calling, to unfold through love and wedlock, and they are very honest, simple-hearted Rosette included, whom Perdican misleads by deceitful words. They possess the charm of healthy natures, and could have been conceived only by a poet who, through lost illusions and through failures, treasured an unimpaired respect for young girls. Musset at all times saw the Ninons and the Ninettes of real life with the eyes of a believer, and they inspired him, in recompense therefor, with the purest element of his work.

The history of Musset's dramatic productions is singular. The pieces long slept in the collection of the *Revue des Deux Mondes;* they were not particularly noticed at the time of their appearance, and were soon forgotten. Nor did their publication in book form in 1840 make any noise either. They were almost unknown when Madame Allan, then in St. Petersburg, heard some one praising a little Russian comedy which was being given in a minor theater. She wished to see it, found it to her taste, and asked for a translation in order to perform the play before the imperial court. Some one, to simplify matters, sent her a book entitled *Comédies et Proverbes par Alfred de Musset*—the little Russian work was the *Caprice.*

Such was the success of Madame Allan with the piece that, on coming home to Paris, in 1847, she brought it in her muff, and on the 27th of November played it, against wind and tide, at the Comédie Française. No one, or almost no one, knew whence it came. And then it was badly written: "'*Rebonsoir, chère?*' In what language is that?" said Samson in suffocating astonishment. On the morrow, a complete revulsion. Théophile Gautier, in his feuilleton, wrote: "This little act, played last Saturday at the Français, is decidedly a great literary event. Since Marivaux, nothing has been brought out there so fine, so delicate, so sweetly humorous as this tiny masterpiece, hidden in the pages of a review, where the Russians of St. Petersburg, the snow-bound Athens, had to find it in order to make us take it." Théophile Gautier next praised the "prodigious cleverness, the perfect craft, the marvelous divination of stage matters of this proverb, not written for the boards and nevertheless more adroitly managed than anything of Scribe's."

The *Illustration* gave a lively picture of the public surprise at the discovery of Musset as a dramatic author: "An unexpected event for everybody at the Français was the complete, gigantic, stunning success of a wee little one-act comedy." Next comes an eulogium on the poet, and thereupon the chronicler returns to the

Caprice: "The wit flashes like diamonds, each scene is fairylike, and yet it is true, it is nature. The spectator is enraptured."

Admiration so great staggers us somewhat, as in the *Caprice* we see a piece charming, no doubt, somewhat better than smart, offhand stage dialogue, but among Musset's productions one of the least.

However this may be, the way was now open, and everything else passed through the opening. *The Door Must be Either Open or Shut* was played on the 7th of April, 1848. *Prudence Spurns a Wager* was performed on the 22d of June following, on the eve of the insurrection. "I thank you," writes the author to Tattet, "for your letter. Nothing has happened to my brother and me but fatigue. At the moment of writing this I am doffing my uniform, which I have hardly taken off since the insurrection began. I will not say a word about the horrors now over. It is all too hideous.

"Amid the above charming eclogues, poor Uncle Van Buck, you see, has been up to his neck. Yet his success was complete, and no exaggeration. It was the immediate eve of the insurrection; I found the hall filled, lined with pretty women, clever people, a parterre of great excellence for me, very good actors—everything, in fact, for the best. I had my own evening, and I took it, so to speak, on the fly. . . .

Next day, good morning! Actors, managers, author, prompter—we all had our guns in our fists, with the cannon for an orchestra, the conflagration for illumination, and a pit full of raving vandals. The militia was so plucky that the spectacle happily made our hearts beat lustily. They were, most of them, mere boys. I had never dreamed of anything like it."

In August the *Chandler* had its turn, *André del Sarto* in November, and they even went so far as to play the unplayable *Fantasio* and the *Nights.*

One of the causes of this prodigious success was that Musset, in the theater, appeared to be an innovator and a realist. His pieces were not made by formula, by the romantic or the classic, and they possessed that loftier truth which is the poet's privilege. "Each scene is a fairy-scene, and yet it is true, it is nature." These words are a summary of the impressions of the first spectators, some of whom went so far as to reproach Musset with being too much *la nature.* Auguste Lireux notes it *à propos* of the first presentation of the *Caprices,* in 1851. "We are not habituated to natural pieces, and the fancy which resembles truth itself, which properly distinguishes Musset." People at that time were too fond of the false to endure the truth readily, and he sums up the play in this way: "A too cruel, too true history!"

Some, nevertheless, were scandalized at the sudden rapture of the public. Sainte-Beuve, who never attached great importance to Musset's plays, at first applauded the popularity of the *Caprice.* When he saw that the matter was looking serious, and that the longer pieces were taken for something more and better than playful banter, his indignation prompted him to write in his *Journal:* "Yesterday I saw Musset's little piece, *Prudence Spurns a Wager,* at the Français. There are extremely pretty things in it, but I was struck with its incoherence and scant good sense. In truth, the characters are taken from a very strange world: the lecturing uncle, a surly fellow, who winds up tipsy; the young man, who is rather a coarse fop than an intelligent and amiable being; the girl, an arrant little puss, a mere milliner from Rue Vivienne, presented to us as a Clarissa, not formed to convert a libertine otherwise than by a caprice of which he will repent fifteen minutes afterward; the insolent and commonplace baronne, suddenly brought out at the end like a mother of mercy—all that is loose, inconsistent, and without sequence. It comes from a world which is fabulous, or seen in song and feasting when wine has done its work. A spirit of detail and an unforeseen drollery compose the thing, mending the rents in the tissue at every moment. But there are people who imagine in all earnestness that

in this play they have the supreme good tone of the most refined society lately gone by, while the truth is that such things never existed anywhere else than in the fumes of the poet's fancy on his way home from smokers' parliament. I am wrong; there are young men, and even young women, who so far are infatuated with this Musset style that they have begun to imitate it, in their way, as much as they can, and to model themselves after this pattern. In this case the original came after the copy, and is not at all an original. Alfred de Musset is the caprice of a *blasé,* libertine epoch." One must feel a little touch of vexation at the critic whose decision has been reversed by the majority. We cited this clumsy, dull page because it fixes the moment when the glory of Musset, after a confinement within narrow circles, began to rise higher. The success of *Caprice* did more for his reputation than all his poems put together. Within a few days he became popular, and his verses profited thereby. The dramatic author had given an impulse to the poet, so that when least expecting it he began to soar skyward.

Musset's prose works embrace, besides, the *Novels, Tales, Miscellaneous Works,* and the *Confession,* which last has almost always had the strange fortune to be judged by defects or its poorest pages, even by its admirers. The youth of thirty years ago read like devotees

the declamations in the two earlier parts, wherein Musset is but an indifferent pupil of Rousseau and Byron. The youth of to-day condemn the book from the same chapters, and seem not to know the idyl which succeeds them: "While walking one evening in the linden path, where it enters the village, I saw a young woman stepping forth from a house which stood apart. She was very simply dressed, and so veiled that I could not see her face; yet her shape and her gait appeared so charming that for a while I followed her with my eyes. She was crossing a meadow near by when a kid, feeding at large in a field, ran up to her; she caressed it, and looked this way and that as if to find an herb to its liking. Near me I saw a wild mulberry; I plucked down a branch and went forward, branch in hand. The kid came on, very slowly and with a timid look, then stopped, not daring to take the branch from my hand. Its mistress made a sign to embolden the kid, but its look was anxious. She came a few steps toward me, put her hand on the branch, and the kid took it forthwith. I made her a bow, and she went her way."

This is the first meeting with Brigitte. Not less charming is the picture of the unpretentious home of the pale young woman with the great dark eyes. The story broadens and rises with the triumphant return of love into those two

hearts—they had thought themselves to be all worn out—and the scene of the avowal is of a grave sweetness. One evening they are on Brigitte's balcony, contemplating the splendors of night. "She leaned upon her elbow, her eyes fixed upon the sky; I bent beside her and watched her as she dreamed. Soon I raised my eyes myself; a voluptuous melancholy intoxicated us both. Together we breathed the mild fumes which floated out from the hornbeams, and we watched the last faint white glimmerings which the moon was dragging downward as she sank behind the black masses of the chestnuts. I remembered a certain day when I had gazed with despair on the boundless void of the beautiful sky, and the memory made me tremble. Now all was overflowing! I felt a hymn of thanksgiving rise in my heart, I felt our love soaring toward God. My arm encircled the waist of my dear mistress; she softly turned her head: her eyes were drowned in tears."

The ramblings by night in the forest of Fontainebleau are peculiarly beautiful, likewise. George Sand and Musset walked there together in the autumn of 1833. Their feet followed the same paths as Octave and Brigitte, their hands clung to the same bushes as they clambered up and down the rocks. They exchanged in faint tones the same confidences. Brigitte's male attire, her cottonade blouse,

which has been a reproach to Musset as a fault in taste, was her traveling costume, the one in the first *Traveler's Letter*. We have seen the emotion of George Sand when she happened upon the hardly disguised tale of their unfortunate passion in the *Confession*. This scrupulous exactitude explains and excuses the somewhat prolonged passages in the fifth part—a tedious recital of quarrels so painful that his rival's victory at the end of the volume is a relief to the reader.

As a whole, it is a work of art of great unevenness, now declamatory, now rising higher, sometimes tiresome, but a book of price through its sincerity, and a great honor to Musset, as he gives everywhere in its pages, without hesitation or reserve, the nobler part to the woman whom he has loved, and who yet had not been free from reproach. Now that all the veils are lifted, such is the light in which the *Confession* stands.

The *Tales* and *Stories* are little narratives without pretensions, written with wit or sentiment, according to the subject. In these Musset has twice or thrice attained perfection. The pearl of the *Tales* is the *White Blackbird*, in which one may see the ill consequences of being a romantic in a family for generations devoted to classic verse. At the first note which the hero risks the father bounds to his feet: "What's that

I hear? Is that the way the blackbird whistles? Is that the way I whistle? Is that whistling? Who taught you to whistle so against all usage and rule?"

"Very sorry, sir," I answered, with humility, "I whistled as well as I could."

"That's not the way we whistle in my family," retorts my father, beside himself. "For centuries we have whistled from father to son. . . . You are no son of mine; you are no merle."

M. de Musset-Pathay took things in a less tragic fashion, but after the first volume written by his son he earnestly believed that that was not the way to whistle.

The white blackbird, repulsed by his kindred, is not recognized by the feathered *cénacles* when he asks for an asylum, because he is unlike anybody else. He takes to singing for himself, and becomes a famous poet. The sequel is not less transparent. He weds a white blackbird, who writes novels with all the facility of George Sand: "She never rubbed out a line or made a plan before setting to work." She had the advanced ideas, also of the author of *Lélia,* at all times taking care to attack the government, by the bye, and to preach emancipation for blackbirds." The feathered poet is sure that he has the bird of his dreams, matching his color as well as his genius. Alas! his wife had deceived him. She was no white blackbird; she was only a bird

like all the blackbirds; she was dyed, and she faded!

The stories are strewn with personal souvenirs. When the love is not Musset in flesh and blood, it is seldom that he has no feature, no adventure in common with his. Almost always the heroines are drawn from life, as also the landscape, interiors, episodes. He invented but little. He wrote from "human documents," and recounted "things of the life he had lived," in the same fashion as our naturalist novelist. But he did not see with the same eyes.

Musset in his plays used a poetical prose which has few rivals in our language. It is highly musical. The harmony of it caresses the ear, the rhythm is sweet and strong. The movement follows with pliant faithfulness the course of the idea, now in peace, now in haste and passion. The epithets are better than sonorous and rare; they have the power of evocation. The ensemble is picturesque and eloquent, never ceasing to be limpid. The art in this is very simple and delicate.

His offhand prose is perfect, a frank and transparent language in which the expression is right, and the turn of the phrase natural and clear cut. The familiar letters are lively, and easy also. Some of these were printed in the *Posthumous Works,* but all that I have compared with the originals have been altered. In

those days the duties of the editor were understood otherwise than now. Paul de Musset did not confine himself to trimming, but he insisted on elevating the style which he considered too negligent. At a pinch he would modify the sense a little. Musset had written to his *marraine, à propos* of love, "*I have* burned my wings passably in due and proper time and place," but Paul prints it, "*They have* burnt my wings passably . . ." Elsewhere Musset said, regarding an article for which he was asking certain information, "I prefer writing a mere *mediocre* but honest page to composing a poem in false gilt coin." That Musset should be able to write a mediocre page was not to be admitted; and in the volume we read, "I prefer writing a simple page." "Rosine was not *Spanish,* but she was witty," is changed to "Rosine was not frolicsome" in the notice of Mademoiselle de Plessy. Pages are entirely rewritten, so that Musset, if he had seen the volume, would have been thrilled with admiration and gratitude for the patient zeal of his brother; but perhaps he would have recalled a kind of work and play combined which, in the time of his youth, aristocratic ladies had taken up with a rage. In the spring of 1831 the ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain passed their days sticking sealing-wax in circles on small bits of cardboard, which thus became candle-sconces. Unable to see anything

useful in this work, Musset asked: "Are the shops all out of sconces? Whence comes this rage for *bobèches*?" Probably his brother's picking work would have seemed to him hardly more useful than the manufacture of sconces of sealing-wax.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST YEARS

MUSSET felt an inability to write coming over him and growing into powerlessness, and he was not ignorant of the cause of it. He knew that he was himself destroying his own intellect day by day, and he watched the disaster with despair in his soul, his will overthrown, incapable of guarding against himself. The evil was of long standing. Sainte-Beuve says, in 1837, "I saw Musset the other day, very amiable, and nice in complexion and face, and so broken and impaired in stamina underneath."

He suffered cruelly while his fate was being accomplished. In 1839, as his brother tells us, he was about to kill himself. The year following Tattet showed to Sainte-Beuve a scrap of paper which he had caught up that very morning in the country, on Musset's table. The verses on it were written in pencil:

I've lost my strength and life of late,
And many friends and merry cheer,
And all that pride's no longer here
Which made men think my genius great.

The causes of this anticipated death are frightfully sad. We should bear in mind the frailty of the human machine, the irrepressible rioting of his nerves, and we shall get glimpses of the physical frailties which caused him to lose the mastery and control over himself. One evening in 1844, after his *marraine* had talked to him in a very serious manner, as she had hopes of leading him to regain control of himself, he lifted the veil which hid his misery until she burst into tears. "I am not able to repeat what he told me. That is beyond my strength. Only you must understand that he defeated me at every point." On the morrow Musset sent her the sonnet printed in the *Biography:* "Let fools calumniate; I hardly care." Let us pass by, turning our heads aside, our hearts full of compassion. Let us feel the pity of it, when a misery can drive genius to such a suicide.

Musset asked no indulgence from the public. "The world has no compassion except for ills of which men die." In his family he gave way to deep sadness, which kept growing with each endeavor to dispel his trouble. One evening, on returning from a pleasure-party, he wrote: "Among those who haunt taverns, there are some who are merry and rosy, others pale and taciturn. Can there be a more painful spectacle than that of a suffering libertine? Some I have seen whose laugh made me shudder. He who

desires to subdue his soul with the arms of the senses can intoxicate himself at his ease; he can put on an apathetic and unmoved exterior; he can lock up his thought in an unbending will; his thought will not cease to low in the brazen bull." His thought did its duty, and continued to "low." His sick and diseased will failed in its duty, and came not to aid him. This moral death struggle lasted more than fifteen years.

In public, or in his letters, he wore a pleasant look and kept up his spirits. His uncommon mobility made the task rather easy. He would amuse himself like a child with the veriest trifles. The minor misfortunes of life, which he never considered it in good taste to take too seriously, had the mighty gift even of reawakening his animation. We may assert that his repeated tiffs with the national guard, when he would not do duty, were wholesome. Generally he got the worst of it, and had to spend the night in the guard-house. When he found himself actually under lock and key in Cell 14, set apart for artists and writers, he found it so preposterous that he laughed in his own face, in prose and verse. Every one has read *My Prisons,* written at No. 14. The poem has a pendant, which is not so well known. In a letter to Augustine Brohan, he says: "I am in irons, groaning amid the dungeons. This is not to prevent my coming to see you to-morrow. But I write you this from the

bottom of the cellular system. At the present moment I am in that famous No. 14, the one ill engraved in the *Diable à Paris*. The cause is patrol duty, as I have not slain anybody."

After such gleams of cheerfulness he sank back and became as gloomy as ever. To the too well-founded reasons for melancholy which have been related were added various annoyances, and among them his scant success. He was always unpretentious—a little less assuming as he grew older—and compliments horrified him so that he appeared haughty and disdainful. "You speak to me," he wrote to Madame Jaubert, "about people who at times are eager to tell me of the pleasure I have afforded them. On my word of honor, nine out of ten compliments are intolerable to me. I do not say that I consider them false, but they give me a mind to cut and run." In 1838 he says to Tattet: "You too! *Tu quoque, Brute!* You are paying me compliments. As they come from you, I take them with a hearty good-will. Do not call me *illustrious;* you might render me sorry that I am not. When you want to pay me a compliment, call me your friend."

But one may be unassuming and all in vain; there is an indifference which grieves and discourages a writer, and the poet of the *Nights* had had a hard experience of it. At all times there had been young men who knew *Rolla* by

heart. The crowd had almost forgotten Musset, for all the brilliancy of his début, because after writing *Rolla* he had detached himself from the group of innovators. He had forsworn the romantic form at the moment of the triumph of romanticism. The press paid no further attention to him, the public in general lost interest in him, and his finest works were greeted, one after the other, by the silence of indifference. In 1833 Heine exclaimed with astonishment: "Among the fashionable he is as unknown as an author as a Chinese poet could be." Madame Jaubert reports this remark, and adds that Heine told the truth. The salons of Paris, her own included, knew only the *Ballad* and the *Andalusian.* One evening at her house, Géruzez took it into his head to repeat, before some thirty persons, the duel in *Don Paez.* The audience listened in surprise. Not one of them had read it.

Counting for so little in the intellectual movement, and, moreover, being somewhat, a little too much, apart from public affairs, Musset, as he grew older, had the emptiest existence. To him, of all great writers, it would be befitting to apply what has been said with such good sense respecting the dangers which come from the literary influence of the salon and of women. Musset lived far too long the life of the salon and in the society of women. By dint of riming *bouquets à Chloé* for his rosy little darlings, and of court-

ing the plaudits of their tiny palms, he lost the habit of virile thinking and effort at the time when it was a question of life and death.

His days were woven of mere nothings when he ceased to give them to labor. His letters bear witness to that. The events of those long years are certain short journeys and many ridiculous passions. In 1845 he passes a part of the summer in the Vosges. On returning he writes to his faithful Tattet: "Nothing lifts the heart or beautifies the mind like these long trips about the kingdom. Incredible is the number of houses, peasants, flocks of geese, beer-glasses, stable-boys, aldermen, warmed-up dishes, village curés, literary persons, high dignitaries, hop-fields, vicious horses, and broken-down donkeys passing before my eyes. . . ."

"I came back with a young beauty of forty-five or forty-six, who was on the way from Warsaw to the Batignolles in the diligences of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. The fact is history: She would eat a Polish cake of the color of Marolles cheese, weep from time to time, and ask what o'clock it was, all because a big gentleman, seven or eight feet long, had, to all appearances, had a squabble with her; this gentleman was called *mon bien-aimé;* at all events, this was the only name I heard her call him." The *bien-aimé* had gone off in a sulk to the back seats, leaving Musset face to face in the coupé with Dulcinea.

"Fancy my situation! Happily, her Ariadne face made me think of Bacchus. So at Voic I bought a bottle of excellent wine for ten sous, good through and through, along with a chicken, and in this way, she weeping, I tippling, we journeyed sadly. O my friend, how many excruciating dramas, sufferings, palpitations may reside in the three compartments of the coach!"

Madame Jaubert was the titled confidant in heart matters. The next letter refers to the falling out with Princess Belgiojoso: "Marraine! The lad is discomfited! Do you know what the poor creature did? He wrote, heart open. . . . They gave him a rap on the head. The answer they made him, O Marraine! was a response not fit for print. . . . And know you what the poor ninny began by doing as he got the answer, immortal or at least worthy to be immortal? He —I—began to weep, and cried like a calf for a full half-hour.

"Yes, Marraine, hot, scalding tears as in my best days, my head in my hands, both elbows on my bed, heel on my cravat, knees on my new coat, and lo! I sobbed like a child having his face washed, and more, I had the advantage of suffering like a hound when they are sewing him up. . . . My room was a very ocean of bitterness, as the good people say. . . ."

This deep despair brought out *Sur une Morte* —lines of excessive cruelty. Musset seemed to

be making his endeavor to win a reputation for frivolity in a country where that finds the least forgiveness. However, the hour of his glory was at hand. It is very hard to trace the latent, deliberate working which goes on in the public mind till it ends in an explosion of renown, above all when a writer is concerned whose work has been long in print. We may note a few indications, hazard guesses; there still remains the element of mystery. The revulsion in Musset's favor was preceded by symptoms which assuredly were very full of meaning. But yet they are far from explaining everything.

In the spring of 1843 the very indifferent *Lucrece* of Ponsard showed how tired everybody was of romanticism. Musset was fated to profit by this revolution in taste. For other reasons, which form the mystery here, his poems began to find a way to every heart; many persons were discovering him. This went on so fast that, three years after the success of *Lucrece* and the failure of the *Burgraves,* we meet with protests against the excess of favor shown him by the young. In the earlier months of 1846 Sainte-Beuve copies into his *Journal* a letter, in which Brizeux says: "What might well astonish you is the exclusive infatuation for Musset. I have small liking for that art in the solemn châteaux of Louis XIV., but the entresol of Saint-Georges Street suits me no better." Sainte-Beuve accompanies these

lines with a note to make them worse. This upward flight which Musset had suddenly taken appears to him ridiculous, as well as a thing to be regretted, and he talks of it in a bitter way. The burst of popularity occasioned by the success of the *Caprice* finished the work of putting him out of humor. We already have seen his prosecuting tone as to *Il ne faut jurer,* and toward the end of 1849 we find him coming back to the popularity of the *Caprice,* and writing: "People overdo everything. In Musset's success there is the genuine and there is mere infatuation. It is not merely the lofty and the delicate element which people like. Our dissipated young men adore in Musset an expression of their own vices, and in his poetry they find nothing finer than certain racy breakings forth, in which he strikes out like a madman. They take the want of human refinement for a token of force." Useless display of sullen vexation. It lay no longer in any one's power to prevent Musset from moving up to the first rank by the side of Lamartine and Victor Hugo. After a riot of tinsel and plumes, which had lasted twenty years, there had come a return to truth and naturalness. Having acquired a taste for Musset through seeing his dramatic works played, those who had applauded him the night before at the Français opened his later poems, and the simplicity of his language enraptured them. They

came upon verses of a frank and high-flavored realism which suited the unwonted needs of their minds, and not less startled were they by the sincerity of his feeling. To the Muse's question in the *Night of August:*

Thy heart is poet or is 't thou?

they also would have answered, without hesitating, "It is thy heart," and this drew them toward the author as toward a friend to whom we can unbosom ourselves. All surrendered to Musset. What he became in a short time for the younger generation he continued to be down to the war, and no one has shown this better than Taine. The page written in 1864 is the first and most discerning page touching the almost irresistible seductive charm excited for twenty years by Alfred de Musset:

"He is dead, and yet we seem every day to hear him speak. The chat and pleasantry of artists in a studio, a pretty young girl at the theater bending over the edge of the box, a street scoured by the rain and the glitter of the blackened pavements, a fresh, cool morning, all smiles, in the Fontainebleau woods—there is naught that does not bring him back before us, as if living a second life. Was there ever a more thrilling, truer accent? He, at the least, was one who never told any lies. He said only what he felt, and as he felt it so he said it. He thought aloud. He

made everybody's confession. We did not admire, we loved him; he was a poet—nay more, he was a man. In him each man detected his own sentiments, no matter how fleeting or deeply felt. He threw off constraint and yielded to inspiration, and he possessed the last of the virtues which remain among us—generosity and sincerity. He had the most precious of the gifts which can cast a spell over a civilization grown old—namely, youth. How he spoke of that hot youth, the tree that has a tough bark, that with its shadow covers all things—highways and horizons! With what impetuosity did he hurl about and clash together love and jealousy, the thirst for pleasure and all unbridled passions which mount with the tides of virgin blood from the deeps of a youthful heart! Has any man felt them more? He was too full of them, he surrendered to them, he was intoxicated with them. Too much did he ask of things. He longed to taste all of life at one draft, bitter and eager. He did not pluck it as a flower and enjoy its fragrance; he tore it away like clustered fruit, crushed and wrenched and bruised it, and stood there, with hands smeared, as much athirst as before. Then burst forth the sobs which echoed in all hearts. What! So young and already so weary! The Muse and her peaceful beauty, nature and her immortal freshness, love and her beatific smile, all the swarm of heavenly visions

hardly pass before his eyes when all the specters of debauch and death flock in, amid curses and sarcasms." "Still, such as you behold him, we continue to love him; we can listen to none other, and by his side all others seem chill and false." He was "never false; he felt the pangs of which he sang; he was more than a poet—he was a man." Even so must all speak, and it is for that reason that we have so much loved Musset, and that no other poet can supplant him in our hearts.

He was still fit to enjoy his popularity, less, however, than if the hour had struck ten years sooner. From 1840 onward, discases swept down upon him: pneumonia, pleurisy, heart-complaint (which was to carry him off), and then nerve storms, followed by attacks of fever and delirium. Each assault left him more nervous and overwrought, too sensitive, restless, excessive in all things, whether in isolation with his aches and his despondency, or flinging himself, with new passion, into pernicious enjoyments. Charming, despite it all, in his better hours, and leaving an ineffaceable impression upon all who, broken loose from college, came to his door to have sight of the poet of youth: "It was no longer that image of an adolescent almost, a kind of Muse's cherub, preserved for us by David d'Angers in his wonderful medallion; but how different was that handsome, grave, resolute, almost energetic

face from Landelle's portrait, in which the dull, lusterless eye is void of light, and life seems exhausted! A head of hair still abundant, but receiving from many a silver thread the changing tint which is not without its harmony, crowned a countenance which, though cold and gloomy when in repose, both grace and wit would soon revive, and then leave pallid or embrowned, and betraying the disease which already afflicted him." Throughout the visit poetry was the topic. "If my pen," said Musset, "is not forever broken in my hand, Suzette and Suzon will not be the subject of my song." His young interlocutors having alluded to the *Hope in God,* and to other pages of similar inspiration, he went on: "Yes, I have drawn from that spring of poetry, but my wish now is to draw more freely from it."

It is in this way that one loves to represent Musset toward the end: a grave and earnest man who, at least in thought, breaks away from the mire in which he was too often accustomed to wallow. The influence of a humble *religieuse* had done much to promote serious thinking. During an attack of pneumonia, in 1840, he had been nursed by Sister Marceline, so often mentioned in his letters. He writes to his brother in June, 1840: "My lines to Sister Marceline I shall finish out one of these days—next year, within ten years, whenever it pleases and if it pleases me—but I shall not publish them, and

I will not so much as write them. It is too much to have repeated them. I have said so many things to idle meddlers, and I shall say so many more, that I have good right, once in my life, to compose a few strophes for private use. My admiration and my gratitude for this saintly woman shall never be soiled with ink from the printer's tampon. This is settled, so do not speak of it again. Madame de Castries approves, and says that it is good to have a secret drawer in the soul, provided we put into it only wholesome things."

At the time of this second sickness he had sent for Sister Marceline. The convent, with great prudence, sent him some one else. He writes to his Marraine: "Instead of her, they have let fly at me a big mama—fat, florid—who eats for four and is not prone to melancholy. She nursed me very well, and she bored me dreadfully. Ah! how rare they are—Sister Marcelines! How few beings there are in this world who can do more, when you are sick and suffering, than give you a cup of tea! How few there are who know how to cure and soothe you at the same time! Whenever Marceline would come to the bedside, little cup in hand, and say, with her little chorister voice, 'What a dreadful knot you are tying there!' (she meant that I was knitting my brows), the poor dear soul would have cheered up Leopardi himself!"

At long intervals Sister Marceline would come

to inquire after his health, chat a few moments, and disappear. Musset deemed these visits to be the favors of a mysterious and consoling force. Once only did he have her to nurse him again. On the 14th of May he writes to Tattet: "I have just had pneumonia. When I say that, it is pleurisy I mean, but the name does not alter the case. You understand, I had *religieuses* to attend to me. My good Sister Marceline came back, then a second with her—kind, gentle, with the charm they all possess, and, besides, a woman of intelligence."

Sister Marceline had treated the soul as well as the body, and, with a pious touch and the boldness of pure hearts, dressed the moral wounds open to her eyes. The language which she used with Musset was new to him. It was austere and it was consoling, but how much she won for God no man has ever known; and yet it is certain that peace came into the sick-chamber with Sister Marceline, and, alas! departed with her. Musset's last years were most painful in spite of the keenly appreciated delights of growing fame. The heart-disease caused him tiresome agitation. He was always restless and in torture, and he was sleepless. His last verses, written in 1857, depict this state of anguish, with no rest or anything else to alleviate it. "I feel my heart stopping suddenly, my strength to struggle worn and wasted away." It was truly a deliverance for

him—his death. On the evening of May 1, 1857, he was worse, and confined to the bed. Sister Marceline was not at hand, but her patient face flitted before the eyes of the dying man, for the last time allaying his pain. Toward one o'clock in the morning Musset murmured, "Sleep! At last I am to sleep!" and he closed his eyes, never to open them again. Death had taken him gently in his sleep. They buried with him a plain little tricot knitted by Marceline, and a pen, embroidered with silk, which the sister had made for him seventeen years before. On the pen was this: "Bear your promises in mind."

The burial took place in gloomy, damp weather. "We were twenty-seven in all," says Arsène Houssaye. Then where were the students? How could they allow the bier to hold their darling poet, and move almost alone along the path to the grave?

His star attained its zenith during the second empire. At that time he enjoyed a dazzling renown. To seat him beside Lamartine and Victor Hugo was no longer contemplated, but his faithful admirers were for putting him a little in front, at the head of the three. While the realistic current carried away certain people toward Balzac, whose great success dates from the same epoch, other men, the dreamers and the more sensitive, stopped at the beginning of the way, close by the poet who had never lied, although

he refrained from uttering everything: Baudelaire would put them to shame for loitering over a poetry of "silken ladders," but he wasted his time and trouble. He wrote to Armand Fraisse, in terms which are too coarse to be given in full: "You feel poetry like a mere *dilettantist.* That is the true way to feel it. From that word which I underscore you can guess that I experienced a certain surprise at observing your admiration for Musset. Except at the age of first communion, I could never endure that dandy-in-chief, with his impudence worthy of a spoiled child, calling on heaven and hell in mere table d'hôte adventures, his muddy torrent of blunders in grammar and meter." Baudelaire's voice cried in the wilderness, as is shown by Sainte-Beuve's note at the foot of the page: "Nothing is a better test of the literary generations which succeeded us than the enthusiastic admiration, the almost frantic infatuation, which seized all the younger men —the gluttons for Balzac, and the dainty for Musset."

His glory had flashed beyond the limits of France, and a distinguished British writer—Francis Palgrave—devoted an essay to him, which becomes doubly interesting to us through the unexpected quality of certain ideas and certain comparisons. After noting the fact that Musset had overleaped the barriers of Paris, Palgrave passes to a survey of his works. He finds

hardly anything but what is blameworthy in the *Confession,* which in his eyes is violent, extravagant, and very false, for all its pretensions to realism. As an offset to this, he puts the *Stories* by the side of *Werther* and the *Vicar of Wakefield.*

The verse makes him think, not of Byron, as we might have expected, but of Shelley, of Tennyson, and "perhaps" of the poets of the age of Elizabeth. The lines are "musical, and not declamatory." Englishmen, according to Palgrave, prefer Musset to Lamartine, because he is less absorbed in his ego, and to Victor Hugo, because he does not weary them with antitheses. Certain pieces of his possess a peculiar and indefinable grace, a beauty as of the ancient world, a something recalling Æolian and Ionian perfection. The *Tales of Spain and of Italy* are decidedly fantastic, he thinks, but full of vigor. The verdict as to the man is of exquisite delicacy. He would have made us bear in mind, had we been tempted to forget it, that we ought to speak reverently of great poets: When men molded of that clay fall, they should be judged with a tender respect. We who are of less fine and sensitive constitution, unable to enter into the mysterious sufferings of genius, into its wrestlings with its angels, we ought not to forget that in a certain sense, and in reality, those men suffer for us; that in themselves they sum up our un-

conscious aspirations; that they put before our sight the spectacle of conflicts severer than ours, and that they are truly the confessors of humanity. We admit readily that many of Musset's first poems, as well as the *Confession,* would not be in their place in an English parlor; that they are works to be kept for those alone who have courage enough, with love of truth and purity of soul, to make such pictures of the abysses of human nature of worth in framing their course of life. But, granting all that, we do not think that men can read Musset without discerning in his genius something of which the history of French poetry has never hitherto furnished an example.

German opinion has not been less favorable to him. An entire volume has been devoted to him by Paul Lindau, who concludes that Musset, if not the greatest poet of his time, is its most poetic temperament. No one equals him in depth of poetic intuition, nor is any one as sincere and as true. It may be that his feelings are unhealthy, but he has experienced them, and has given an expression to them which is at all times perfectly candid. He detests the comedy of sentiment, and he hates phrases. He lives in unceasing fear of self-delusion, preferring self-contempt to self-deception. This absolute integrity and candor is what captivates us and wins us again, the thing which endears him to us. Grillparzer said that the spring of all poetry was in

the truth of the sensation; Musset's poetry is, all of it, explained by this truth. When he is wrong, he is still in real earnest. Lindau also recalls the fact that Heine called Musset the foremost lyric of France.

To this glory nothing has been wanting, not even the dangerous honor of originating a school and of being imitated as a poet may be imitated —in his method, in his choice of subjects, his vocabulary, his whims, his minor defects of every sort. Innumerable were the songs, the flippant madrigals, the little bits of unsavory, free-and-easy verse, the licentious pieces more like the younger Crébillon than Musset, the Ninons and Ninettes of Breda Street, the contraband marquises and Andalusians out of the Batignollies—of all these Musset would now be the grandsire, responsible for them before posterity, had anything of them survived. It is a blessing that all that is forgotten, for the family was not desirable. Musset of the best days, of the great days, Musset of the *Nuits* could bring inspiration; he could kindle the spark slumbering in others' hearts, but he could have no disciples, for he had no processes and no manner—he, the most personal of poets. You cannot obtain from any man his heart and nerves, or his poetic vision or his lyrical emotion. In a word, you cannot obtain his genius from him, and there was almost nothing to borrow from Musset save his genius.

The same causes which raised him so high in the favor of the many are now turning away from him the approval of the new school, that which grows great upon the ruins of naturalism. Our young men no longer like the natural, either in idiom, thought, feeling, or even in things. A taste for the singular has got hold of them again, and one for the distortion of the real. Whether they style themselves decadents or symbolists, it is mere romanticism, disguised and debaptized, springing up anew in their productions, but yet easy to detect beneath the mask, and in spite of altered labels. It has grown to be far more mystic. It has lost the arrogance which recalled Corneille and the heroines of the Fronde, and it has borrowed from the moral or mental something scant and flabby, but hard to delineate. It is helped along by a complicated and learned art, tested by which the art of the Cenacle is merely child's play, but which seems rather Byzantine when compared with the bold and potent development of the romantic phrase. This is the same, with thinner blood, weaker temperament—yes, it is the same old romanticism. What interest could the poet of the *Souvenir* awake, with his simple sorrows within all men's scope and with his classic French, in those merely curious as to rare sensations—the inventors of decadent writ? Accordingly, Musset has been one disdained by them. The violence also of his feel-

ings has been an injury to him with the later generations. It is with wonderment that they contemplate the ravings of passion and storms of sensibility in the folk of 1830. They are too practical or too intellectual to devour their own hearts; the woes which Musset cursed and blessed by turns with equal vehemence inspire them with nothing more than the ironical pity usually bestowed upon ridiculous misfortunes. What attraction can a poetry possess which is all sentiment and passion in the eyes of youth who call sentiment mere weakness, love an infirmity? None, assuredly. And they have forsaken Musset, after pronouncing him to be all out of fashion, as much in substance as in form. He will bide his time. His great fault lies in being still too near to us. The ideas and literary forms of yesterday always shock because they form an awkward restraint, and because we make haste to be free of them. It is only when they have, for good and all, yielded the ground, and can no longer offer hindrance to any one, that we judge of them with impartiality. So, for example, Lamartine, after an almost total eclipse, is now coming forth again from clouds which once enshrouded him. So Vigny is having a second aurora, more brilliant than the first. For Musset the time has not yet come. Before men return to him they must have quite left him, and Musset continues to reign, like a tyrant, without sharing

the throne with another, over a great many gray and grizzled heads, who really cannot listen to another.

A few years more and the generations who submitted to him will have vanished. Then, for him, it will not be an hour of oblivion, but rather an hour of justice, serene and unclouded. Posterity is to make its own choice among his works, and when it shall hold in the hollow of its hand the bunch of leaves in which the soul of an entire epoch shudders and weeps with Musset, it will exclaim, understanding his sovereign empire and repeating the words of Taine: "He was more than a poet, he was a man."